



COMMUNITY FIRST
DEVELOPMENT

ARP-DREAM: STORY 2

STORIES OF CHANGE

VISUAL DREAMING

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Visual Dreaming's vision is for First Nations youth to dream and thrive, building First Nations youth leaders for tomorrow and the next seven generations. This story focuses on Visual Dreaming's dream and some of the progress achieved towards this dream through working together with Community First Development. It has been co-authored as part of Community First Development's latest Action Research Project on measuring long-term outcomes with communities.

WHO IS A PART OF THIS STORY?

Visual Dreaming

Visual Dreaming is an Aboriginal-owned social enterprise located in Wagga Wagga, NSW, on Wiradjuri Country. Founded and led by Leanne, a proud Tati Tati, Wadi Wadi, Mutti Mutti and Gamilaroi woman, Visual Dreaming is designed to support Elders and community leaders across Australia to sponsor the renewal of cultural practices and buy back land with cultural significance.

Community First Development

Community First Development is a First Nations' community development and research organisation. Community First Development is a registered not for profit organisation and has been working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for over 20 years.

Community First Development's vision is a world beyond the gap where First Nations' people and communities are thriving – with a focus on self-determination underpinning all the work that is done alongside communities, and to support cultural strength for First Nations' communities to achieve recognition, growth, and security.



LEANNE, VISUAL DREAMING'S FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, WITH SHANAE, WHO WORKS CLOSELY WITH LEANNE AS A YOUTH ADVISOR AND PROJECT MANAGER

THE COMMUNITY'S DREAM: WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TO COMMUNITY?

From Little Things, Big Things Grow

Visual Dreaming's vision is for First Nations youth to dream and thrive, building First Nations youth leaders for tomorrow and the next seven generations. They want to reduce the numbers of youth suicides and improve mental health in the Riverina. Their dreams are for First Nations youth to have strong cultural identity and feel confident in being in leadership roles.

"I WANT TO SEE THAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CULTURALLY STRONG AND PROUD OF WHO THEY ARE. AND THAT ALL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE FEEL SUPPORTED. THEY HAVE THEIR GOALS AND THEIR DREAMS, AND THEY JUST BELIEVE THAT NOTHING'S IMPOSSIBLE. AND THAT THEY'RE SUPPORTED EVERY STEP OF THAT WAY."

- Leanne, Founder and Director

With health and Country intrinsically linked, Leanne's ultimate goal is to buy back land to assist with healing.

"I THINK MY BIGGEST GOAL, THE THING THAT GETS ME OUT OF BED EVERY MORNING, IS I WANT TO BUY BACK LAND. AND I ALREADY HAVE THE LAND PICKED OUT WHERE I WANT TO BUY, WHICH HAS HERITAGE ON IT... BUT WITHOUT THAT LAND, WE CAN'T HEAL. A LOT OF HEALING CAN'T START UNLESS WE'VE GOT SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO US."

- Leanne, Founder and Director



The Aboriginal Community in Wagga Wagga is significantly younger than the non-Aboriginal population, **WITH A MEDIAN AGE OF 20 VERSUS 36 YEARS.**



There is a much lower proportion of Aboriginal people aged 65 years or more: **4% COMPARED WITH 16%.**



Reports of severe or profound disability are also high among the Aboriginal population (6.5%), **WITH 13% OF ABORIGINAL ADULTS (AGED 15+) GIVING ASSISTANCE TO A PERSON WITH A SEVERE DISABILITY.**



In the Murrumbidgee region of NSW, the suicide rate for the total population was two times higher than the NSW average **(21.5 PER 100,000 VERSES 10.8. PER 100,000).**



Among the Australian population, suicide rates are more than twice as high **IN YOUNG ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE COMPARED TO YOUNG NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE.**

Sources

NSW Government Aboriginal Affairs. (2017). Community Portrait: Wagga Wagga LGA. <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/research-and-publications/facts-and-figures/community-portraits/Indigenous-Portrait2016D-Wagga-Wagga.pdf>

Mental Health Commission of New South Wales. (n.d.). Murrumbidgee Regional Profile. https://www.nswmentalhealthcommission.com.au/sites/default/files/old/220-018_living_well_murrumbidgee_regional_profile_v3_22april2020.pdf

Connection to Community First Development's Story of Change

Community First Development's Story of Change concept aims to communicate how the organisation works and the outcomes the organisation contributes to achieving with communities. Similar to an ecosystem, this concept has a core (self-determination), organisms (the 'outcomes'), and elements that contribute to the ecosystem flourishing (Community First Development's people, approach and governance).

Community First Development works with each community to define the community's 'dream' (or 'long-term goal') and associated dream indicators, and link these to Story of Change outcomes. Developing dream indicators can be iterative and may be undertaken after several projects.

Visual Dreaming's journey connects with Community First Development Story of Change outcomes of Stronger Healthier Lives, followed by Stronger Economic Outcomes.

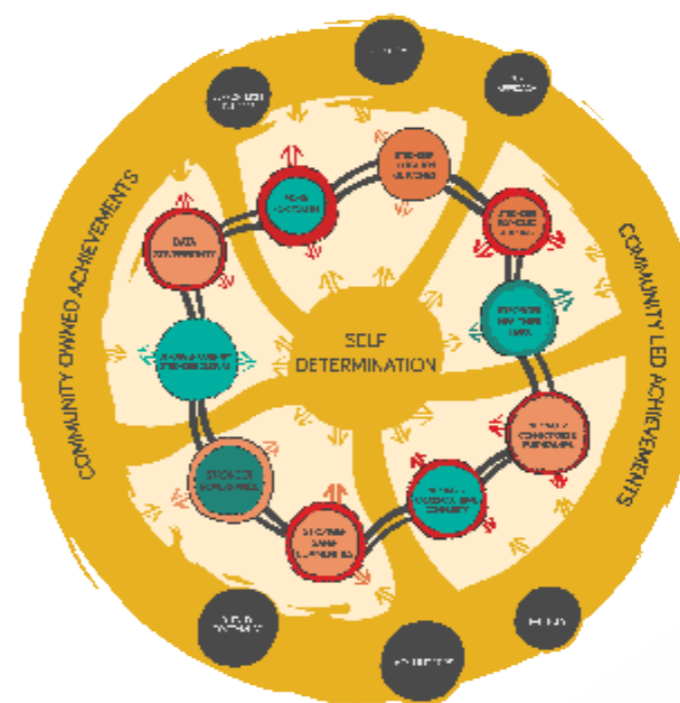


Figure 1: Community First Development's Story of Change concept

The Visual Dreaming Approach & Journey So Far

"BUT THE OTHER THING IS WITH OUR MOBS, THERE IS INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA, AND WE KNOW WHAT WE NEED AROUND SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING. AND WE CAN HAVE ALL THE ACCESS TO SERVICES AND SOMETIMES WE DON'T HAVE ANY ACCESS. BUT IF IT'S NOT A CULTURALLY SAFE SPACE, AND CULTURE AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING ARE AT THE CENTRE, THE GAP WILL NEVER CLOSE FOR OUR COMMUNITIES."

- Leanne, Founder and Director

Central to Visual Dreaming's approach is the way in which the organisation is closely integrated into the broader community, with oversight and ongoing guidance provided by a committee of highly respected Wiradjuri Elders.

"WE ARE REALLY FORTUNATE THAT WE HAVE POSITIVE ELDERS IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND IN THE CIRCLE THAT WE ARE SUPPORTED BY. THEY ARE UPLIFTING AND THEY ARE POSITIVE. AND THAT THEY DO WANT THINGS TO BE BETTER IN OUR COMMUNITY. AND THEY JUST REALLY BELIEVE IN US. AND THAT IS IMPORTANT, BECAUSE WITHOUT THAT TRUST AND BELIEVING IN US, WE CAN'T MAKE THE CHANGES THAT WE WANT TO BE ABLE TO MAKE, BECAUSE ELDERS PLAY A VERY, VERY VITAL ROLE IN WHAT WE DO."

- Leanne, Founder and Director



VISUAL DREAMING'S FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, LEANNE, MEETING WITH COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEERS, PAUL AND MEM, AND SENIOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, RUTH.

Leanne describes the Visual Dreaming community as being like “family”. This encompasses the Visual Dreaming team who are all First Nations, the clinical advisory team, the Wiradjuri Elders Advisory, and the broader support network that includes Community First Development.

“AND WE’RE LUCKY WE’VE GOT THE SMALL VISUAL DREAMING TEAM, WHICH IS ALL FIRST NATIONS. AND THEN WE’VE GOT THE ADVISORY, THE CLINICAL ADVISORY... AND THEN WE’VE GOT WIRADJURI ELDERS ADVISORY. AND THAT IS WHERE WE GO TO THE WIRADJURI ELDERS AND CHECK IN, AND ENSURE THAT EVERYTHING WE ARE DOING, WE ARE CONSIDERING WIRADJURI FIRST. AND THEN WE’VE GOT YOU (RUTH, COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT SENIOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER) AS MY COMMUNITY, AND THE TEAM AROUND THAT.”

- Leanne, Founder and Director

Visual Dreaming’s programs are designed to enhance community collaboration, life skills, wellbeing and cultural competency and provide services to support Aboriginal youth and help them to connect to culture and community.

Working under the oversight and ongoing guidance of the Wiradjuri Elders, Visual Dreaming developed a bespoke app for young people that is designed to be used as a clinically integrated tool designed around a patient-centred care model.

In late 2020, Visual Dreaming launched their app as a wellbeing tool to bring communities together by connecting current and future generations to their First Nations’ community, culture, and Country. It draws on the cultural practices of Aboriginal people including visual storytelling to support users to set goals and connect to community and professional support networks in the Wagga Wagga region.

Most recently, Visual Dreaming launched a pilot program called Butterfly Dreaming. The program is designed for young girls to discover and understand who they are, be proud of their identity, and build confidence and leadership skills.

It incorporates the traditional wisdom of Wiradjuri Elders with modern technology in the form of an app. It offers a new generation of solutions that has the potential to make a real difference to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

WHAT DID WE DO TOGETHER?

Since 2020, Visual Dreaming has invited Community First Development to work with them on five projects, two of which are complete. During this time, Visual Dreaming’s goal and vision has remained the same. In terms of how they achieve this goal, Visual Dreaming has pivoted their business model in response to unforeseen circumstances and new opportunities.

In 2020, Leanne first got in contact with Senior Community Development Officer (SCDO), Ruth, inviting Community First Development to assist Visual Dreaming to develop a business plan. Ruth is a Wiradjuri woman who has worked at Community First Development since 2018. Ruth has a publishing and editorial background and is strongly committed to social justice for Aboriginal people. There are many aspects of her role that she finds rewarding, including working closely with communities like Visual Dreaming.

“THERE ARE MANY REWARDING ASPECTS TO THE ROLE. BEING ABLE TO SPEND TIME WITH COMMUNITIES AND WORK WITH THEM ON PROJECTS IS SO GREAT. IT’S A PRIVILEGE TO ASSIST WITH THINGS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE. I CAN’T EMPHASISE ENOUGH HOW AWESOME OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE. I ALSO REALLY VALUE THE EXPERTISE AND GENEROUS GIFT OF TIME AND KNOWLEDGE FROM OUR VOLUNTEERS. I HAVE MET SOME INCREDIBLE PEOPLE IN THIS ROLE. AND KNOWING THAT THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT OUR WORK, WANT TO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AND WHO VALUE OUR APPROACH TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IS HUMBLING AND REINFORCES FOR ME THAT THERE IS MUCH GOOD IN THE WORLD.”

- Ruth, Senior Community Development Officer

Community First Development skilled volunteer, Rochelle, worked with Visual Dreaming to develop a detailed and thorough business plan to guide their work. Leanne provided the following reflections on the project:

“THE BUSINESS PLAN IS A GOOD TOOL TO USE. WE CAN USE THE CONTENT IN MULTIPLE WAYS TO SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR ORGANISATION TO OTHERS. IT IS VERY USEFUL TO HAVE LANGUAGE IN THE BUSINESS PLAN THAT IS TRANSPARENT TO GOVERNMENT AND STAKEHOLDERS. THE CULTURAL SUPPORT BY (SCDO) RUTH HAS BEEN AMAZING AND WAS THE BIGGEST HIGHLIGHT OF THE PROJECT.”

- Leanne, Founder and Director



VISUAL DREAMING’S FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, LEANNE, AND COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEER, PAUL UNDERTAKING BUSINESS PLANNING.

In 2021, Community First Development skilled volunteer Justin, a young Aboriginal man who is a highly skilled IT security architect, worked with Visual Dreaming to scope and review the IT security for their app. This project opened up a new direction for Visual Dreaming while also keeping this space open to explore further in the future. For Leanne, the highlight of the project was working with Justin.

Visual Dreaming and Community First Development are

“JUSTIN IS VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE. THE BIGGEST HIGHLIGHT WAS HAVING SOMEONE THAT IS FIRST NATIONS TO TALK THROUGH CYBER SECURITY AND THE RISKS WITH OUR CULTURAL IP.”

- Leanne, Founder and Director

currently working together on two interconnected projects. With Visual Dreaming’s new direction, Community First Development skilled volunteer, Paul, is working with them to refresh their business plan, scope out potential partnerships and provide business mentorship. Community First Development skilled volunteers, Christine, a mental health nurse practitioner and Mem, a branding and communications specialist, are working with Leanne and team to develop a marketing plan and communications strategy. The volunteers have also assisted Visual Dreaming to draft media releases for the launch of a book they were involved in and a new program they have developed.

Visual Dreaming also recently invited Community First Development to work with them on a fifth project focused on building their grant writing capacity to support them to secure increased funding for their programs and operations.

WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE TOGETHER?

These projects demonstrate how Community First Development supports First Nations’ business owners and entrepreneurs in diverse areas, providing a unique, culturally appropriate and multi-faceted approach to business development. Visual Dreaming are gaining strategic tailored support and confidence in these areas, which will have a positive effect on their ability to expand their services and programs to support more Aboriginal youth and holistically connect them to Elders and service providers in the Wagga Wagga and Riverina region.

These projects also demonstrate the long-term support Community First Development provides to communities, should communities request this.

“AND I THINK THAT WHAT COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT DO, AND I JUST BOAST ABOUT YOU EVERYWHERE, IS THAT YOU ARE THERE FOR THE LONG TERM. AND WHEN I MEAN LONG TERM, IT’S NOT JUST AN EIGHT-WEEK PROGRAM “GET YOUR IDEA OF YOUR BUSINESS AND OFF YOU GO, SEE YOU LATER”. IT’S WALKING WITH YOU EVERY STEP, KNOWING THAT WHEN WE HAVE SORRY BUSINESS, OR WE HAVE THINGS COME UP IN COMMUNITY, THAT WE’RE NOT IN A RUSH TO COMPLETE THIS IN A CERTAIN TIME.”

- Leanne, Founder and Director

SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF THE YOUTH HUB AND CONTINUED GROWTH

Volunteer Paul’s skilled input, ready support and ability to get to the heart of matters relating to the grant terms including creating complex budgets for their major grant proposal was central to Visual Dreaming (with close support from their primary contact person in the Department of Justice), in developing a competitive grant application that has secured government program funding for their continuing operations. In addition to launching the Youth Hub and their successful Butterfly Dreaming and Maliyan Dreaming programs for girls and boys, Visual Dreaming continue to grow and thrive. Now their growth is also extending into support for other Aboriginal women in business in the NSW Riverina area. Visual Dreaming’s unshakeable belief and passion for supporting and serving the local community is incredibly inspiring and is resulting in community driven and strength-based, grass-roots programs that are delivering such positive impacts in the Riverina area. Read more about the youth hub at: [Dream becomes reality as Wollundry Dreaming’s Youth Hub opens in Wagga’s CBD | Region Riverina.](#)

COMMUNITY REFLECTIONS ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As part of the Action Research Project with Community First Development, participating communities reflected on the concept of, and approaches to, monitoring and evaluation during Yarning interviews.

Leanne understands the purpose and value of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). She believes the approach should be tailored for First Nations' contexts and involve relationship-building; evaluations should have a longer-term focus as it is difficult to see impact in the short-term.

"I THINK THAT MONITORING AND EVALUATION SHOULD BE DIFFERENT FOR FIRST NATIONS, BECAUSE YOU CAN WRITE ANYTHING ON A PIECE OF PAPER, BUT WITHOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND ACTUALLY SEEING THE IMPACTS YOURSELF. AND IT TAKES TIME. EVALUATION TAKES TIME BECAUSE, JUST LIKE I WAS TALKING ABOUT THAT THEORY OF CHANGE BEFORE, THAT LITTLE SEED. TO SEE THAT BIG SEED IS NOT A SHORT-TERM THING. IT IS A LONG-TERM EVALUATION."

- Leanne, Founder and Director

Community First Development's approach to monitoring and evaluation with communities

Leanne and Ruth have developed a strong and trusting relationship. They regularly yarn together about the changes that Leanne wants to see, the ways Visual Dreaming can achieve these changes, and the achievements and challenges Visual Dreaming has encountered along the way.

"THE SCENARIOS THAT WE GO THROUGH GIVE US THE EVIDENCE THAT WE KNOW THAT THIS IS BEST PRACTICE AND THAT THIS IS WHAT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE NEED. AND I THINK THAT THE CONVERSATIONS HAVE BEEN HELPFUL, ESPECIALLY AROUND THE MARKETING PLAN AND MAKING SURE THAT WE ARE ABLE TO SUPPORT OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE SAME JOURNEY AS THE YOUNG BOY THAT WE SUPPORTED. WE DON'T ALWAYS HAVE SUCCESS STORIES. BUT WE DO KNOW THAT WHEN OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DOING STUFF WITH OUR ELDERS, IT'S ALWAYS A SUCCESS."

- Leanne, Founder and Director

In terms of Community First Development's M&E approach, Leanne believes Community First Development's approach is relatively clear. She loves the focus on the "dream" or long-term goal but finds the term "indicator" a bit confusing because she associates it with risk assessments. Leanne believes it could be helpful to digitise some aspects of Community First Development's M&E paperwork. She also believes that it could be worth Community First Development checking in with communities at certain points in time after a project has been completed, to get a better understanding of the impact of that project.

"MAYBE PART OF THE EVALUATION FOR COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT COULD BE CHECKING IN TO SEE THE IMPACT. AND IT COULD BE JUST A RATING AND SEEING HOW THAT RATING GOES."

- Leanne, Founder and Director

WHAT IS THE NEXT STAGE OF THE JOURNEY/THE DREAM?

Visual Dreaming are at an exciting stage in their dream journey. They are currently focused on refreshing their business plan and finalising their marketing plan and communications strategy. With the focus on building their grant writing capacity, Visual Dreaming hope to be able to apply for and acquire the funding required to achieve their dream. For Community First Development, it has been a privilege working together with Visual Dreaming. We look forward to seeing where 2023 takes them.

"WORKING WITH LEANNE AND SHANAE AND SEEING THE JOURNEY OF GROWTH THAT VISUAL DREAMING HAS BEEN ON HAS BEEN AN ABSOLUTE PRIVILEGE. THEIR UNSHAKEABLE COMMITMENT TO THEIR COMMUNITY, GENUINE SUPPORT FOR ELDERS AND CARE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE DRIVES THEM EVERY DAY TO MAKE POSITIVE, CULTURALLY INFORMED AND MEANINGFUL CHANGE."

- Ruth, Senior Community Development Officer



SENIOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, RUTH, WITH LEANNE AND SHANAE FROM VISUAL DREAMING.



“... AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO, IS OPERATING IN A WAY THAT SUPPORTS SELF-DETERMINATION SO THAT WE CAN MAKE OUR OWN DECISIONS ON OUR HEALTH, EDUCATION, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES. AND THE CONTINUATION OF OUR CULTURE INCLUDING LANGUAGE.”

STEPHANIE HARVEY,
COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT
CEO



ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT OVERVIEW

This story has been co-authored as part of Community First Development's latest Action Research Project. The research explores the effectiveness of Community First Development's approach to measuring long term outcomes and how Community First Development contributes to communities achieving their dreams.

Dreams drive the success of the project, as well as the revitalisation and resurgence strategies that communities are putting in place. Community First Development has learned that the multi-dimensional aspects of the dream narrative cannot be understated – economic, environmental, mob, spiritual, cultural customs, and Country.

Monitoring and Evaluation is an important part of communities' and Community First Development's story. It is a time to reflect and celebrate. It informs us both of where we are and how far we have come with the projects. Dream indicators connect projects to the community's dream. Dream indicators inform us of where the community's dream journey is at, including the wider and longer-term impact of the projects we do together.

All community dream and project indicators are created through listening, yarning, and collaborating with communities.

This Story of Change focuses on Visual Dreaming's dream and the projects Visual Dreaming has chosen to work on with Community First Development, towards achieving this dream.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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YOUTH WORKER LUKE WIGHTON WITH THE WOLLUNDY DREAMING "JUNIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM", OLIVIA, JAYDAH AND ZALIAH.
PHOTO: CHRIS ROE, REGION RIVERINA.

“WE ARE DRIVEN BY THE NEED OF A BETTER WORLD FOR ALL FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE; TO WORK WITH ALL CULTURES FOR RECOGNITION, RESPECT, AND THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED AND VALUED WITH EQUALITY. WITH OUR PEOPLE. FOR OUR PEOPLE.”

COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT

OUR VISION

First Nations' peoples and communities are thriving.

WHO WE ARE

Community First Development is a First Nations' community development and research organisation that creates positive change in and with First Nations' communities.

WHAT WE DO

We undertake social and economic development, and research projects in partnership with First Nations' communities, businesses and people. Communities have control; they name the priorities and choose the design, assets, capabilities and approaches to achieve their vision. We provide tailored support through community partners, skilled staff, trained volunteers, key supporters and service providers.




WE DO THINGS WITH,
NOT TO OR FOR,
OUR PEOPLE.



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