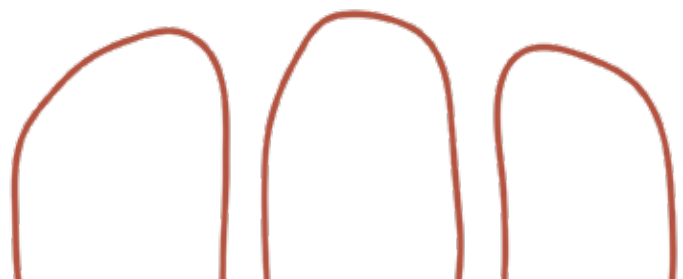




# HOMELAND SCHOOL COMPANY



ANNUAL MEMBERS' REPORT  
DECEMBER 2024





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# SNAPSHOT

The Homeland School Company has been set up by Traditional Owners from the Djelk Indigenous Protected Area to establish three on-Country, full-time schools. These schools will be at Buluh Kaduru, Gamardi and Gochan Jiny-Jirra, with a Learning on Country shed at Bolkdjam. Each school will be community-owned and will have its own bi-cultural curriculum. To achieve this, we've appointed a Chief Executive Officer, have held bi-monthly board meetings, and have supported the registration of over 100 members. We are in the final stages of submitting our formal independent school

registration to the Northern Territory Department of Education. Once our registration is approved, we will transition from a combination of philanthropic and enterprise funding to a majority federal government funding model. HSC has also been consulting with landowners and families about what infrastructure needs upgrading, including teacher accommodation, and what leasing arrangements need to be made. This will be our focus for the next 12 months, along with Bininj and Balanda recruitment.

## HOW DID HSC COME ABOUT?

Across the homelands of the Djelk Indigenous Protected Area, traditional landowners have despaired the educational neglect of our children and grandchildren. In some cases, there are six-month gaps between teachers visiting the run-down schools in our communities. This neglect runs counter to the United Nations decree that 'Every child should have a right to an education.' More broadly, it threatens cultural preservation and biodiversity conservation.

Inspired by the success of similar homeland initiatives in the neighbouring Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, leaders and community members got together to talk about independent education at a 2022 forum in Maningrida. During the forum, HSC Director and NLC Chairperson Matthew Ryan noted, 'There are a lot of homelands that want school to start happening in their own way. It's a long time coming, and it's coming from the landowners, and the leaders from the homelands, to start an independent school.'

Garth Doolan, from Gochan Jiny-Jirra, said, 'We need that high education. And that is very important, because they [the children] are our futures. Me and my brothers are struggling ... We got a teacher's house there. No one's actually using it.'

This forum inspired the plan to explore independent education on Djelk homelands. Following the forum, Bininj leaders initiated a process to source funding, which led to the establishment of the Djelk Education Steering Committee. This consultation, funded jointly by BAC and KKT, resulted in an investment from the Paul Ramsay Foundation to formally establish HSC governance, recruit a CEO, and commence strategic planning to register three schools.



HOMELAND SCHOOL COMPANY EST. 2022

SET UP BY TRADITIONAL OWNERS FROM THE DJELK IPA



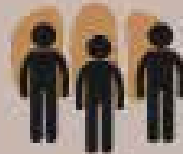
'There are a lot of homelands that want school to start happening in their own way.'

– HSC Director, Matthew Ryan

The first 3 independent schools will be at Bulun Kaduru, Gamardi and Gochan Jiny-Jirra, with a Learning on Country shed at Balkdjam.



We have a dedicated CEO



We have an experienced Board of Directors



We have 100+ members



Final stage of submitting registration for 3 schools



Section 19 applications submitted to NLC for formal leasing



Consultations underway with homelands and BAC re infrastructure upgrades



### What next?

- Registrations approved
- Teacher recruitment
- Jobs for Bininj on the homelands
- Staff housing
- Place-based curriculum development





# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

## DALE PASCOE



My vision is for us to build the capacity of our kids. By setting up independent schools on the homelands, we're thinking about how our old people's knowledge can be respected, and how we can teach the young ones on country. We don't want to see our kids feeling lonely, or not knowing anything about where they are from. These schools will be flexible—they will be set up in a way so that our children and grandchildren don't miss out on ceremonies, and don't miss out on funerals. I want to see HSC grow. We know that with the government, it's always a little bit of salt, and a little bit of sugar. The homeland schools won't be run by the government. They'll be run our way. We are slowly calibrating the things that we need. It's there. The schools will be fully registered soon, and then there'll be no worries.

Over the last year, Nic Sharah and I went to Gamardi, Gochan Jiny-Jirra, Buluh Kaduru and Bolkdjam. We've been sitting down with the families, seeing the agendas, talking, and looking, and understanding what these communities want, and what they need, so that these independent homeland schools will be successful. We know that some of these homelands, they've been struggling. So, it's like planting seeds, and watching the seeds grow. It's not up to one person to do this, for himself. It's a relationship. We've been working together, with the members, with the old people, bringing everyone together. The members will be strong, and the Balanda will listen. Not pushing against each other, but coming together, Balanda and Bininj, working together as citizens.

As we grow, we'll bring in extra members for the board. We'll build up the board so there

are people from different homelands. I want our members to see the agendas, and to know what's happening so that they continue to be part of it. This way, everybody will be happy. Other hands and voices will all come together to make that strong foundation. The young ones will also be part of the meetings, and they'll listen. We're going to show them our voice and which path they are moving on. This is my thinking. Everything to do with these independent schools will be flexible and honest.

We're starting with the three outstations and Bolkdjam, but I'm confident other people on the homelands will see that it's moving, it's happening, and will want to ask how it's going. The generosity—it's there. We're not putting Gamardi to be higher, we'll start with these three schools and then help other communities if they want to be a part of it. I'm confident that we're moving in the right direction. We're getting close to our goal.





Above: the Homeland School Company undertaking consultations with Traditional landowners from Gochan Jiny-Jirra.





Above: Homeland School Company Director Jacqueline Phillips talks about HSC's plans to a delegation from the former NT Labor Government at Buluh Kaduru. The government's visit was to officially sign off on Maningrida's Local Decision Making Agreement.



# CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT

## NIC SHARAH

I feel one of our most notable accomplishments in the last twelve months has been the ownership and strategic influence the four homelands have exercised over the Homeland School Company's direction. This has been evident through our many consultations and community engagements. We've spent a lot of time talking to families out on country, as we've worked to build individual and place-based school plans for Buluh Kaduru, Gamardi, Gochan Jiny-Jirra. This has involved decision-making around infrastructure, section 19 applications, and leasing requirements. There is a voice for each of these homelands that will shape and direct the schools once they're up and running, and these voices will be formalised through appointment to School Councils. But I think it's also important to acknowledge, that despite these individual plans and voices, we also have a strong collective direction, and this is what makes us powerful. I'm pleased to report that we now have 100 members from the homeland school sites, as well as the Learning on Country site at Bolkdjam.

We've faced some challenges, including the fact that we don't have a fully equipped base on the homelands yet, and like many organisations based in the Djelk Indigenous Protected Area, we've found ourselves working mostly out of Maningrida. We've also struggled with limited resources for additional staff and access to transport. I understand there's a high expectation for things to happen quickly and that people feel disappointment around the lack of services—not just education. We're working as fast as we can, but are limited by some constraints, such as the time it takes for school registration to be formally processed. Nonetheless, I don't see any of these challenges as impossible.

We have an exceptional and hands-on board of community leaders, and our strong cultural leadership means most consultations have been in language, empowering Traditional Owners and Djunkay to have input in HSC's planning and direction, at every step of the way. We've also engaged a highly experienced Northern Territory education consultant to assist us through the school registration process. Kristy Rees is the founding Director of Thrive Territory and she's had experience in this space on Groote Eyelandt and Tiwi Islands.

Looking ahead, we're exploring significant investment opportunities through the Homeland School Company Language Precinct, which presents a major opportunity for growth. The precinct would bolster our initiatives by providing vital educational, corporate, and residential infrastructure. It would support local Bininj staff, trainee educators, and create space for researchers, university faculty, and linguistics professionals. Other areas which require attention to ensure the long-term sustainability of our schools include key infrastructure, the creation of homeland jobs and training, and pathways to connect place-based employment with our company.

By carefully considering and resourcing business and strategic plans for each homeland, and ensuring these plans are supported by the board, we can maintain continuity and direction, regardless of leadership changes. While this approach requires significant investment and effort, it reinforces a clear sense of ownership and vision for the company's future. A strong online presence, a defined brand, and a solid historical foundation further support this path. Once registration and principal appointments are finalised, we will focus on implementing place-based development plans to solidify our long-term success.

I'd like to finally thank Homeland School Company's board for their pragmatic approach, on-the-ground support, and commitment to a shared vision that drives the company forward. Their strategic insight and dedication have been instrumental in shaping our direction.





The Homeland School Company recently undertook consultations with families and landowners at Gochan Jiny-Jirra.





# PARTNERSHIPS

## HOW ARE PARTNERSHIPS HELPING US DRIVE COLLECTIVE IMPACT?

### **Karrkad Kanjdji Trust (KKT)**

The Karrkad Kanjdji Trust (KKT) is a philanthropic trust that was established by Traditional Owners of the Warddeken and Djelk Indigenous Protected Areas in 2010, to support their vision for healthy Country. As custodians of much of West and Central Arnhem Land, they innovatively recognised the potential strength and increased freedom and flexibility of alternative funding sources.

Today, KKT is a shared resource to eight First Nations community-controlled organisations in Arnhem Land (including the Homeland School Company), supporting the preservation and revitalisation of culture, and the conservation of over 50,000 square kilometres of land and sea Country.

### **Nawarddeken Academy**

Nawarddeken Academy on the neighbouring Indigenous Protected Area has been offering HSC pro-bono administration and payroll solutions. Now that we're set up, this has shifted to a fee-for-service arrangement. Nawarddeken has also been instrumental in providing us with strategic guidance, and assisting us with the school registration process.

### **Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation**

HSC understands that school developments on the homelands need to be supported by roads, general maintenance, internet, housing and

construction. We've been collaborating closely with Bawinanga to discuss upgrades that homelands families have identified that will help support our schools. Bawinanga has also committed to support grant opportunities through their carbon program.

### **Nja-marléya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group**

We recently delivered an on-country men's camp at Bolkdjam in partnership with Guumali and Nja-marléya. Led by Senior Elder and Loreman Jack Nawilil, the camp focused on passing on cultural knowledge, with Jack teaching participants how to harvest fire sticks, cook underground, use bush flavours, and build traditional shelters. In 2025, we'll work together to deliver additional men's and women's camps at our homeland school sites.



Below: Bush oven preparation in full swing at Bolkjam during a planning camp that HSC attended with Nja-marléya. Both organisations share a common goal of prioritising Bininj-led activities that contribute to the preservation and transfer of cultural knowledge.



# MEMBERSHIP

## WHO CAN BECOME A MEMBER OF HSC?

Homeland School Company is Aboriginal owned by members with connection to the homelands of the Djelk IPA. You can become a member if you have cultural connections to the country where the school is. This might be on your mother's side, your father's side, your grandmother's side, your grandfather's side or your great grandmother/grandfather side. Becoming a member means you

can have a say in the homelands school plan for your community. Each school will have a School Council, and members can also put their hand up for nomination to the HSC Board of Directors. Further, once the School Councils are set up, one person from each School Council will also be nominated for the HSC Board, to ensure fair representation across each homeland.

# SECTION 19 LAND USE AGREEMENTS & LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Section 19 Land Use Agreements allow traditional Aboriginal owners to review development proposals and set terms, including the right to reject unsatisfactory plans. Homeland School Company has been working closely with families and homelands communities to determine the preferred location for school buildings, teacher accommodation and any new infrastructure. It's important for us to do this the proper, formal way. It empowers traditional landowners and gives two-way accountability between HSC and the communities we'll be working within. Further, having a formal leasing partnership means the community gets monetary benefit through the Northern Land Council, as well as a legal level of security, should any changes take place that might otherwise impact the smooth operation of the three schools.

Another safeguard we're putting in place, to allow for the growth and continuity of these schools,

is the development of business and strategic plans for each location. We've worked with communities to develop broad plans, but over the next 12 months we'll be finessing these. The business and strategic plans will give a continuity of direction and ownership over the place-based direction of each school. These plans will be part of the induction for all new HSC staff, so that everyone—from teachers, to the CEO, to support staff—will be quite clear on the aspirations each homeland community has for their school and the supporting infrastructure.



Below: HSC joined Nja-marléya on a planning camp at Bolkdakam, which will help shape the direction of future camps on country.





# BLUE SKY PROJECTS

One of HSC's focuses will be to create jobs within our company, on the homelands. In addition to teaching and administration staff, we'd also like to employ assistant teachers, cultural specialists, drivers, cooks, cleaners and grounds people. Simultaneously, we'll be exploring other funding opportunities which will support the creation of jobs and training outside the school precincts. With the establishment of other services and industries, it will become more viable for families to be able to live and work on their traditional country. An opportunity we're also just beginning to explore, at the direction of our board and our members, is Early Childhood. There's great scope to include early years learning as part of our broader educational vision.

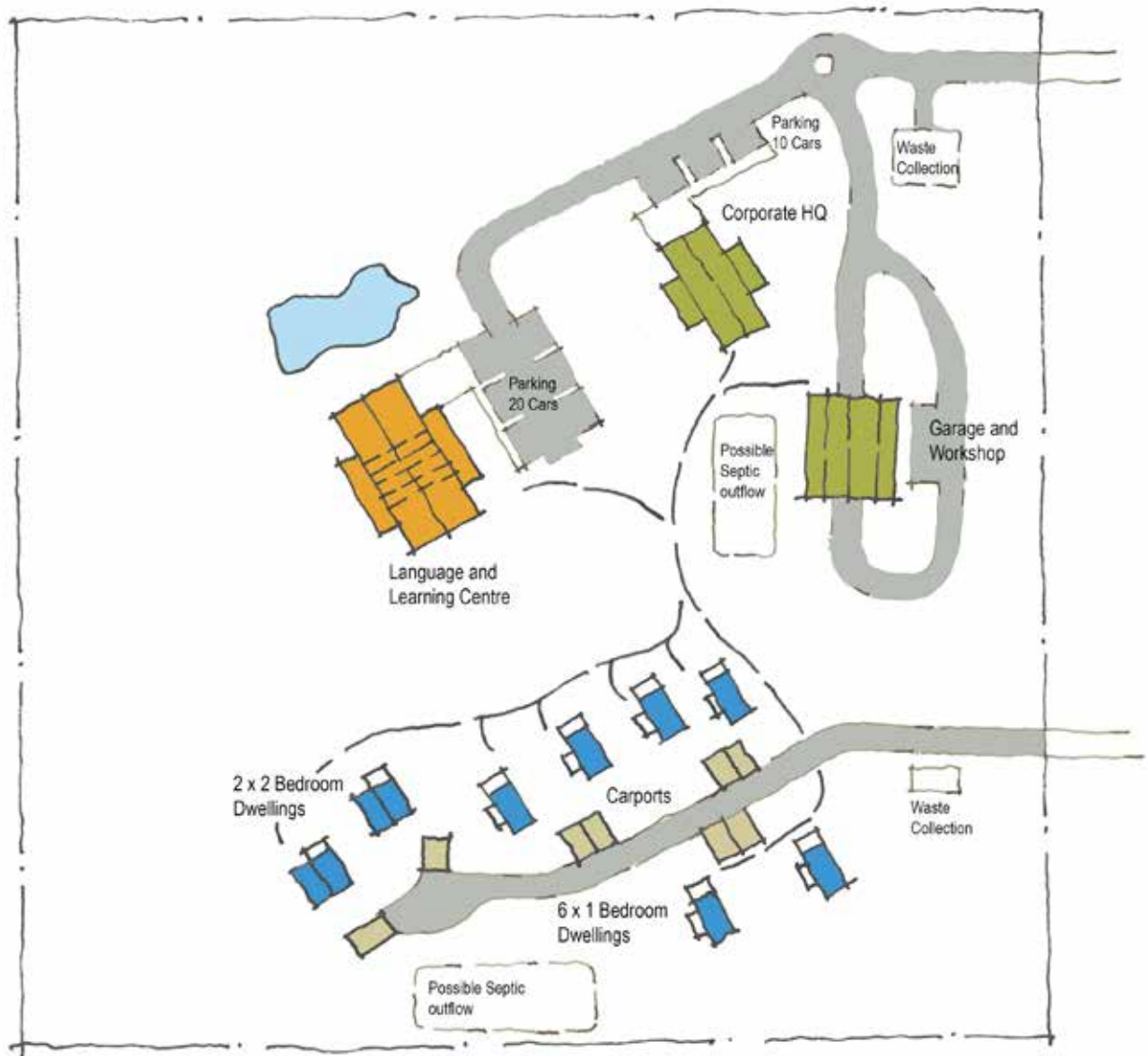
Our broader educational vision will be supported through the creation of an HSC Language Precinct. The Precinct will provide educational, corporate, and residential infrastructure. The residential infrastructure will accommodate researchers, university lecturers, linguists, and Homeland School Company teachers who are in town for training. The educational infrastructure, including a bush university, recording studio and library, will support local Bininj staff, trainee teachers, and cultural leaders. Finally, the corporate component of the Precinct, will form the Homeland School Company's headquarters and storage shed to safely house vehicles and other assets.

The HSC Language Precinct and the Homeland School Company schools will go hand-in-hand, like dhuwa and yirritja. Dhuwa and yirritja encompasses one's mother's side of the family tree, and one's father's side of the family tree. They are two halves of our world view and they fit together perfectly—just

as the schools and the language and culture centre will fit together, in balance.

For more information about this, please email [admin@homelandschoolcompany.org.au](mailto:admin@homelandschoolcompany.org.au) and we can send you a detailed brochure, or have a chat with Nic Sarah or one of our Directors.





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Site Masterplan

The Site Masterplan for the HSC Language Precinct, illustrating a proposed layout of the facility.

# OUR DIRECTORS



## Dale Pascoe

Dale Pascoe, the HSC Chair, is a senior Mapi Traditional Owner from Gamardi outstation. Dale has previously served as the chairman of the Maningrida School Council and has held positions on a number of community boards.



## Jacqueline Phillips

Jacqueline Phillips is from Jibena homeland and is a member of the An-bara Marragich clan from the Blyth River. She is the current Chairperson of Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, a Councillor at West Arnhem Regional Council and a Representative Member of the Northern Land Council. She also an active member of the Maningrida Housing Reference Group.



## Monica Wilton

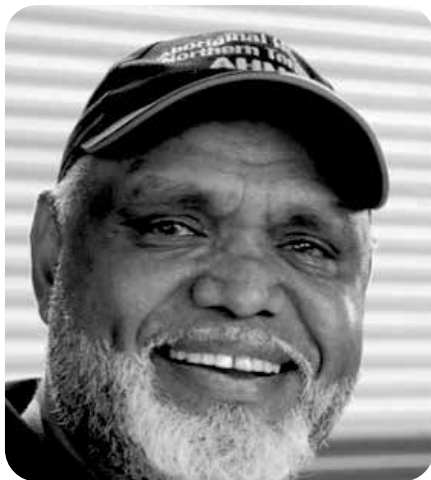
Monica Wilton is a Djébbana speaker whose clan is Marro (coastal seaside area). Monica started her teaching career at Maningrida College in 1990 and has been an educator now for thirty-four years. She's a highly experienced Ndjébbana teacher and interpreter. Monica was recently elected as a Councillor with the Shire of West Arnhem.





### **Laurie Guraylaya**

Laurie Guraylaya is a director of HSC Ltd and is a highly regarded and lauded educator from Maningrida school. Laurie has been a strong advocate for the establishment of a bush university in Maningrida, to create more education and training opportunities on country.



### **Matthew Ryan**

Matthew Ryan is the current Chairperson of the Northern Land Council. He has served as Mayor (for two terms) with the West Arnhem Regional Council, as Chairperson (for two terms) with Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and holds current positions on the boards of Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and Aboriginal Housing NT. Mr Ryan previously worked as an Aboriginal Community Police Officer in the Northern Territory Police Force.



### **Garth Doolan**

Garth Doolan is a director of HSC Ltd and is a current director of Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation and Deputy Chair of Nja-marleya Cultural Leaders and Justice Group. Garth has been a key part of Maningrida's leadership, in advocating for better local control over the justice and education systems of the Maningrida region.

# OUR RECRUITED DIRECTORS



## **Teya Dusseldorp**

Teya Dusseldorp is Executive Director of Dusseldorp Forum. She worked formerly as a lawyer with the Australian Human Rights Commission as an advisor to the Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner and with the National Inquiry into the Stolen Generations. She holds degrees in Arts and Law from the University of Sydney and a Master of Arts from UTS.



## **Olga Scholes**

Olga Scholes is the Nawarddeken Academy CEO, which is the neighbouring Bininj controlled organisation that has inspired the leaders of Maningrida to explore independent education. Olga has worked as an educator for around 25 years and has been essential to holding Indigenous knowledge and governance at the heart of the Nawarddeken Academy's model for bi-cultural education.



## **Bill Fogarty**

Bill Fogarty is Director of Education at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and has lived and worked in remote communities for over 25 years and has extensive experience in research on Indigenous education, employment policy and service provision. He has qualifications in anthropology, communications, social research methods, education and applied development.



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