

Call for artist to illustrate new Njernda children's book

ABORIGINAL and Torres Strait Islander artists in the Echuca-Moama region are being invited to register their interest in being commissioned to create artwork with an important message to convey in a new children's story book.

Written by Njernda Aboriginal Corporation staff member Sharyn Kelly and collaborator Karen Lee Mills, the beautiful story follows the journey of eight-year-old Billy Turtle.

Billy has to leave his Country on the Murray River to go into Foster Care in the city when his Nan falls ill.

Billy is frightened, lonely and misses being home. Will there be someone on Country that can step in and help him?

Njernda Foster Care Recruitment and Assessment Worker Sharyn Kelly said conveying the importance of cultural connectedness for Aboriginal children who need Foster Care placement is the inspiration for the book.

"Once it's determined that a child will be placed into Foster Care, our goal is always for the child to remain on Country, with their mob and in surroundings familiar to them," Ms Kelly said.

"But the sad reality is that if we can't meet the care need in our local community, children sometimes need to be placed elsewhere, which only increases their confusion, uncertainty, and the trauma they experience.

"Our hope is to create a resource to highlight why being a Foster Carer in our local community is important."

Ms Kelly said the Njernda Foster Care program is a culturally responsive service that supports carers to care for Aboriginal children and young people and maintain cultural identity and cultural safety.

"We accept carers from all sorts of backgrounds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, men and women, single people and families – our program is focussed entirely on what is best for each child in our care," she said.

"We have some wonderful Aboriginal carers and families, but equally, we have non-Indigenous carers who believe, as we do, that when care is needed, our local community is the best place and provides the best outcomes.

"We're hoping to create a much bigger network of people in our community who are committed to caring. The more people who understand the importance of keeping our kids on their Country and all the benefits that brings, the more people we hope will put up their hand."

All artwork submissions will be judged by a Njernda panel who will make the final decision on the artist to be commissioned to illustrate the book.

To register your interest, email Sharyn Kelly SharynK@njernda.com.au or phone her for more information on (0419) 613 974.