



## **KEEPING KIDS ON COUNTRY THE KEY TO CONNECTION**

**SOME familiar faces are hitting the big screen at the cinema and on local TV screens, with an important message to convey about the significance of keeping local kids on Country if care is required – and it’s a message particularly close to the heart of the ad’s participants.**

The new Njernda Foster Care ad has been unveiled at the Echuca Paramount Cinema, encouraging potential foster carers from the Echuca Moama community to step up and lend a hand to provide care for local children who are in need of support.

The ad features three Echuca locals – Neva Takele, her son Brody Atkinson and grandson Joel Atkinson – who have faced having one of their own Mob being cared for in the city.

“I’ve raised my 10-year-old grandson his whole life, but I recently became unable to care for him due to health reasons,” Neva said.

“We tried to get him into care here in the local community, but there wasn’t anyone who could take him. So, my eldest daughter stepped in and put her hand up – but that means he is now in the city with her instead of on Country where he belongs.”

Neva said she has seen first-hand the behavioural and personality changes in children who have been removed from Country in her own grandson.

“He’s taking it really hard,” she said.

“He’s always been a little bush boy, always been close to and loved the river, animals, nature, the whole lot. Now he’s in Melbourne, and while we’re grateful that he’s safe, he’s just not where he belongs and his unhappiness shows. He misses home, he misses his Mob and he misses his surroundings.

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Foster Care Recruitment and Assessment Worker Sharyn Kelly said Njernda’s mission is to find more foster carers from all backgrounds and walks of life in the Echuca Moama community.



“We know keeping our kids on Country and keeping them here in their community with their family networks, friends, schools, sports and hobbies is the best way to support them through a rough time,” Ms Kelly said.

“These are young ones who are already having their lives in upheaval, so keeping that connectedness to their Country, their mob and their surroundings is absolutely imperative.

“By creating this ad, we’re hoping to highlight the need for foster carers in our community, and to encourage people who are thinking about taking up foster care, to put their hand up, because the fact is – we need them.

“Unfortunately, if we can’t meet the care need in our local community, children sometimes need to be placed elsewhere, and that only increases their confusion, uncertainty and the trauma they go through.”

***For further information contact Sharyn Kelly at Njernda (0419) 613 974***