

Media Release

March 1, 2023

Local artists chosen to illustrate new children's book

Beautiful, locally produced First Nations artworks will illustrate a new children's book highlighting the benefits of keeping foster kids on Country.

Njernda Aboriginal Corporation last year asked for submissions from artists who would like to contribute to the upcoming book, *Keep our Kids on Country*.

Written by Njernda staff member Sharyn Kelly and collaborator Karen Lee Mills, the book follows the story of Billy, a boy who lives on Country with his Nan.

When his Nan falls ill, the eight-year-old is moved into foster care in the city and struggles while living away from his home by the Murray River.

After receiving a wide range of submitted works, a Njernda panel has selected Neva Takele and her daughter Desrae Atkinson to illustrate.

"I'm honoured to be part of it," Neva said.

"It was a story that resonated with me because of my own experience trying to keep my grandson on Country," she said.

"I read the story and thought, this is my story!"

That personal connection inspired the artist and her daughter to develop the illustrations for the book.

"My daughter and I do a lot of collaborative artwork so we decided, let's have a go at the book," Neva said.

"We decided on using the turtle – a grandmother and a boy – and the little turtle had a smile on his face, and I just thought well, we'll go with that, and we were chosen!"

Author Sharyn Kelly said she was thrilled to have Neva and Desrae on board.

"The panel loved their submission and the way they were able to relate so closely to the story," Sharyn said.

"We hope the story will inspire more Echuca-Moama people – those who are First Nations as well as those who are not – to become part of the Njernda Foster Care Program," she said.

"It's such a critical service and we know the benefits of having young people raised with a strong connection to their Mob, their Culture and their Country.

"Delivering foster care is challenging, but we have a fantastic support team here to help those looking to get involved."

The book is due to be released later this year.