

## Gamarada – A Spiritual Awakening

### PRESS KIT



Using a combination of different spiritual and healing techniques including Dadirri, Gamarada helps a growing number of Aboriginal men in Redfern to break the cycle of incarceration and addiction.

**Contact: Mark Taylor**

**Ph. 0405 116 183**

**[mark@curiousworks.com.au](mailto:mark@curiousworks.com.au)**

## **TECHNICAL SPECS**

Gamarada - A Spiritual Awakening

Duration: 25:06mins

### **Logline:**

Using traditional healing techniques, a growing number of Aboriginal men in Redfern, Australia are breaking the cycle of incarceration and addiction.

### **Synopsis:**

Redfern, the urban stronghold of Aboriginal Australia is changing and so are the men in its community. A group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men have been meeting regularly over the last 3 years to confront their issues with anger, addiction, loss of culture amongst men in the local community. Using a combination of traditional eastern, western and Indigenous healing techniques, the group is transforming the lives of men recently released from jail or fighting addictions.

The film reveals how knowledge is power and why the Gamarada story is a prime example of how remarkably malleable are perceptions of ones place in society. This is the story of their individual journeys and the regaining of their roles as men in community.

### **Credit List:**

Narrator: David Leha

Editor: Mark Taylor

Cinematographer: Mark Taylor

Director: Mark Taylor

Audio Mix: Marcus Longfoot

Executive Producer Margaret Ann Smith

Producers: Mark Carroll, Mark Taylor

Production Company: Cine Esperanza

### **Outline of main Characters**

Ken Zulumovski is Gamarada's tireless leader taking great strides the area of Aboriginal men's health in Australia. Ken is a proud Gubbi Gubbi man and dedicated to his work as a clinical psychologist in the Aboriginal Community. Depression, anger and addiction are major issues that are crushing men in his community.

Assisting Ken in the running of the program is Dave Beaumont, himself a victim of the effects of dispossession and alcoholism having lost his Aboriginal mother to depression and addiction. Dave is an active practitioner of Dadirri and facilitator of the Gamarada Program, often quoting Dr Martin Luther King when talking about self-empowerment within the community.

From his professional role in the parole office, Mark Carroll has seen the devastating effect incarceration has had on his Aboriginal clients. Witnessing the anger and disadvantage faced by his men prompted Mark to look beyond the inadequate institutional support offered to men rejoining their communities. Marks philosophy to 'lead from behind' has enabled his role to be taken over by

Ken and Dave.

David Leha, aka Radical Son when he performs on stage, has experienced the harsh realities of the criminal justice system and a life shadowed by uncontrollable violence, spending 10 months in solitary confinement during his last prison term. Dave has been out prison for over 3 years now thanks in part to Parole Officer and Gamarada founder Mark Carroll. David has embraced the spiritual journey that is Gamarada and has successfully broken the cycle that propels serial offenders back into incarceration. In the film's narrative we follow David's journey closely as he becomes a community leader, a loving father and eventually, a loving husband.

What unites David and the other men is their willingness to take a new direction, a commitment to the journey of healing and strong faith in themselves. These men have been introduced to powerful tools to help rise above the discrimination and anger and with open hearts and minds they can share these tools with other men.

## **The Story**

Partly narrated by David Leha, this 26 minute deeply affecting film opens with some of the Gamarada men onboard the Tribal Warrior as they journey across Sydney Harbour to undertake their graduation ceremony. Men dance on the island and perform a traditional song about the role of the men in the Aboriginal community. In the narration, David Leha explains the founding of the healing group.

Back at the Redfern community Centre where the Gamarada meetings take place, Tom Calma of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, talks about what healing means for the Aboriginal Community.

We meet and hear from two recent graduates of the Gamarada program, Uncle Robert, a member of the stolen generation who has spent most of his life in and out of jail and Leo, a Dunghutti man who has fought alcoholism for much of his life and is now free of the addiction. We watch Leo walk through the streets of Redfern to arrive at the Gamarada meeting as he tells us about his decision to join the program. Both Robert and Leo give highly personal accounts of the traumas each have faced as displaced Aboriginal men and describe their spiritual journeys through Gamarada.

As we watch activities of the group, program facilitators Dave and Ken tell us about the inadequacies of existing services in the community when dealing with Aboriginal people and describe how Gamarada takes a more holistic approach, identifying the importance of self-responsibility. Uncle Robert reveals his own story. Uncle Robert was taken from his Aboriginal family at a young age and never got to meet his parents and siblings. To Robert the group presented a way to reconnect with himself and his family as we see him meeting and embracing his sister for the first time.

An information night is organized to attract new men into the program. Over 100 men and women turn up to the Redfern Community Centre to listen to Dave & Ken and some of the recent graduates describe their stories of transformation. Offering his blessings for the program is Shane Phillips, Chief Executive of the Tribal Warrior Association and well-respected elder often referred to as the unofficial Mayor of Redfern. Also present is Sydney City Deputy Lord Mayor Marcelle Hoff, a strong supporter of the program. The floor opens up at the info session with men and women appealing the need for positive change in the community. The outcome is positive for the Gamarada group and there are a healthy number of men enrolled for the next mentor program.

Gamarada builds momentum and we encounter a surprise visit by the Social Justice

Commissioner, Mick Gooda who shares a special presentation on Lateral Violence that he has adopted from his experience of Canada's First Nations People. His presentation helps the men see the broader perspective of ones actions and the actions of those around them, particularly in the use of words and language that keeps a disadvantaged community disempowered.

Over the next few weeks, Ken and Dave facilitate a natural introduction of Aboriginal cultural practice into the program. Perhaps the most significant being Dadirri, a philosophy wholly new to the men in the group where they are taught the ancient art of deep listening and getting in touch with their inner selves. The men also learn the healing power of traditional dance and we see men of all ages joining together in a traditional dance. The different techniques allow the release of negative energy that some of these men have been carrying for years.

We listen to Mark Carroll talk openly about his experiences with spiritual programs within the justice system in helping offenders pull their lives together. As we watch men practice Dadirri and breath-work, Mark talks about the power of Dadirri, and how the practice relates to forms of meditation in other cultures. Mark describes in greater detail the effect this practice is having on the men, the spiritual awakening and the connectedness the men begin to feel, with their spirit and more broadly to their families and community.

Leo describes his own spiritual awakening and the strengthening he receives from Dadirri and the connections he now feels with his ancestors.

Aboriginal artist and activist Adam Hill shares Leo's sentiments when we visit him in his Redfern studio. Adam reveals his motives for participating in the program each week.

David Leha has much to offer other men in the group, we watch as he leads a mind body strengthening technique with 20 other men. He is a long way into his journey of healing and is now imparting crucial techniques that have the power to keep men from reacting to heightened situations that could land them back in jail, the first step in the journey. In a personal interview, Dave talks about the effect the program has had on his children who accompany him each week, as they learn about the meaning of words like compassion, peace and respect, words that David never understood until a few years ago. Dave talks about the process of healing and how it is important that his family is with him on the journey.

Someone who believes that healing the men first will heal the community is deputy Lord Mayor Hoff. Marcelle praised the work of the group and talks about how as a society we cant afford to lose another generation of Aboriginal men.

The film comes towards a close as we listen to personal testimonies from some of the men on the impact that the Gamarada healing program has had on their lives. Dave and Ken talk about the future of the Gamarada program and its establishment into regional communities along with the development of centre for healing.

Finally, the film accompanies David Leha down the isle as he takes his wife's hand in marriage. In their care are eight children and we depart the film sensing that those children will be the beneficiaries of the transformation work of Gamarada.

Ultimately the film reveals how knowledge is power and why the Gamarada story is a prime example of how remarkably malleable are perceptions of ones place in society. This story is about healing and how these Aboriginal men are regaining their roles as leaders in their community.

## **EDUCATIONAL NOTES FROM THE GAMARADA PROGRAM**

Therapeutic healing includes a combination of traditional and Western therapies to help individuals and communities recover from trauma. The success of these approaches seems to be the melding of cultural interventions and therapeutic work to facilitate healing. Some examples of therapeutic healing are:

- yarning circles
- individual counselling
- group therapy programs
- men's and women's groups;
- community wide healing circles
- traditional ceremonies and traditional healings
- residential programs and retreats, and ;
- may even include other not so conventional approaches such as the recent Gamarada warrior dash event, describes as a mud crawling, fire leaping extreme fun run from hell.

These approaches are commonly adapted by Gamarada to target a wide range of groups that may benefit from healing, including:

- members of the Stolen Generations and their families.
- young people who have experienced abuse or family violence;
- people involved in the criminal justice system; and
- people with alcohol and other drug issues;

While a lot of group programs are based around "talking therapies", Gamarada teaches participants practical skills such as, stress management, relaxation, breathing and visualisation exercises. The concept of awareness is explored in detail in connection to Indigenous spiritual concepts like Dadirri (deep listening and quiet stillness). Anger management and emotional control are addressed in Gamarada using "non-reaction" techniques, which are focal points that are consistently reinforced through practical application. The program encourages participants to apply these skills in order to gain greater control and harmony within their lives and relationships.

Gamarada and Education

Gamarada promotes the value of education both traditional and formal and, through Biyanga Naminma, engages men to be involved in the education of their children aged 0-19. The men, and in turn their families, learn about the importance of education and its fundamental relationship to closing the gap in Aboriginal health and stifling the cycles of poverty that lead to crime, prison and unfulfilled life aspirations.

Gamarada building leadership capacity above and beyond

By creating leaders Gamarada achieves sustainability and extends the reach of its positive impact on men and their families. A train the trainer program has been developed to foster men's confidence and skills to create and deliver programs that focus on healing, leadership and capacity building for their own communities. Of note, Gamarada graduate, Mr David Leha, a former prisoner, became formally employed to facilitate the session, "Anger Management and Non reaction" for the NSW Department of Corrective Services.

Training of graduates involves attendance to the 10-week-structured program, participation in community events (indigenous and non-indigenous), leadership and intensive mentor training.

The program places emphasis on time management and personal organisational skills.

Participants are given responsibility for the smooth running of the program, for example starting and finishing on time, managing the breaks, arriving early to assist in setting up the room, preparing resources, looking after the elders, managing administration. This includes; completing attendance and consent forms, preparation for guest speakers and, seeking permission from other participants to delegate necessary tasks required for the session. These core elements along with a set of group rules developed during week one and reinforced at each session create a foundation of safety and respect for healing and the emergence of leadership.

### **BIO - DIRECTOR Mark Taylor**

Mark currently works as an educator in film and digital media at CuriousWorks. In the past few years Mark has worked on a number of ABC productions as Editor .

#### **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

- Director/ Cinematographer - Festival Mata Air, A short documentary about an environmental festival that takes place in Central Java, Indonesia each year (2007)
- Director - La Lucièrnaga, A documentary on life in Argentina seen from the perspective of young people working on the streets (2003)
- Editor - Now I can Change the World, A documentary questioning the philanthropic power of billionaires, ABC (2010)
- Editor - Bluebird AR, An Alternate Reality Drama, released on ABC online (2010)
- Editor - Ace Day Jobs, A series for DVD and broadcast ABC Television (2009)
- Editor - Wagging School, A series for DVD and broadcast ABC Television (2008)
- Editor - Into the Limelight, A film about homelessness, Brain & Mind Research Institute (2008)
- Editor - Shapin Up, Documentary about boxing in Redfern (2008)