

MEDIA RELEASE

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Unique Council project transforms more than unwanted junk

An innovative project is creating more than one-of-a-kind furniture for the participants of a Roper Gulf Regional Council Community Development Program in the Indigenous community of Barunga.

The project involves transforming donated and recycled materials into head-turning furniture that can be utilised by participants and their families in the community, which is about 80 kilometres south-east of Katherine.

The community turned out in force to celebrate the project on September 14 as participants unveiled some of the furniture, created predominantly with 44-gallon drums donated by Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation (JAAC).

The drums stored aviation fuel in their previous incarnation but have been turned into a range of seats and tables that belie the humble beginnings of their materials.

Male participants are responsible for the construction of the furniture, while female participants spearhead a sewing effort to ensure the creations are comfortable as well as practical.

While the project is providing participants with new skills and a cost-effective furnishing solution for their houses, the biggest benefit is one that cannot be sat on.

Between grinding drums back to bare metal to allow the stunning transformation to begin, Javin Harrison explained that the project had provided him with a new-found sense of community and self-worth.

“It’s changed my life,” the 19-year-old said as he inspected his work.

“I love the activity because it’s different to the other ones.

“It’s a lot better than staying at home and makes you somebody.

“It makes you feel happy.”

There was dual cause for celebration at the unveiling as the organisations finalised a long-awaited partnership agreement that will enable CDP participants to work on country under the supervision of JAAC employees.

To mark the occasion, CDP participants presented JAAC Chief Executive Officer John Berto with a seat featuring a plaque and his organisation's logo.

"I'm blown away by what they've built," Mr Berto said as he sat in the seat for the first time.

Mr Berto added that he hoped more CDP projects in remote communities across the Northern Territory followed the Council's innovative lead.

"I've been around here and there, to most communities in the Northern Territory, and have never seen anything like this," he said.

"You've got to tell the rest of world this; they'll want to know."

Sommer Meadows is one of the Council's CDP Senior Employment Supervisors and the impassioned brainchild behind the out-of-the-box projects in Barunga and neighbouring Manyallaluk, and described the creation of the furniture as "an amazing journey".

"This is what community is all about," she said.

"It's going to help these men build furniture for their families and for their houses.

"It's been a real group effort and I'm really proud of them."

The Council runs CDP projects in 13 communities in its Local Government Area on behalf of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Federal Government initiative assists jobseekers in remote communities to find employment as they contribute to their communities and gain new skills in the process.

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