

The Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative

COOP CARD*

Location: Sydney, New South Wales

Year of foundation: 1987

N° of members: 60

Sector: Aboriginal artists cooperative

Key themes: Identity recovering, indigenous peoples' empowerment, socio-economic inclusion



AUSTRALIA

CONTEXT

This cooperative story is highly related to the condition of Aboriginal people in Australia and the so-called Stolen Generation. From 1890s to 1970, the Australian government established the Aborigines Acts, which was aimed at erasing the Indigenous Australian culture by taking away the Aboriginal children from their families and, thus cutting their relations with their communities, languages and lands. These children were raised in institutions and adopted by white families, with the purpose of wiping out the Australian Aboriginal culture**.

50 years later, Aboriginal people are still suffering economic, social, and health effects from these political and social measures.

Furthermore, a continuing cycle of trauma for descendants of the Stolen Generations is reported. Children living in institutions are more likely to experience adverse outcomes than other indigenous children. Notably, this demonstrates a transfer of intergenerational poverty and trauma.

**The Lancet (2018) Australia's Stolen Generations: sorry is not enough, The Lancet Public Health, 3(9)

AUTHORS

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*Information collected during a fieldwork carried out in May 2019.

COOP STORY

The Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative was established in 1987 by ten Aboriginal artists who were striving for recognition from the mainstream art society and their diversity was unparalleled (Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Online).

They challenge preconceptions around urban-based Aboriginal artists and have created a unique space for themselves within the art field.

Currently, the cooperative has 60 members. They are all Aboriginal artists who have found, in the Boomalli cooperative, an opportunity to not only develop their career but also to express themselves, their beliefs, and to reconnect with their own identity roots.



HOW HAS THE COOPERATIVE CHANGED MEMBERS' LIVES?

- **Space for creativity:** It is a space where they feel free to express their own creativity, beyond any stereotypical classification of what Aboriginal art should be or not, as decided by the international tourism market;
- **Working conditions:** By exhibiting in the cooperative's art gallery, they have control over their artworks, they can earn more than they would in any other gallery, and they can avoid being exploited by intermediaries;
- **Networking:** The cooperative gives them the opportunity to find new job opportunities and better contracts;
- **Personal empowerment and inter-generational relationships:** It provides them the opportunity to increase their self-confidence and be inspired by older artists' members.

SELECTED QUOTE

“Belonging to the cooperative is like medicine. It’s healing and it gave me identity”

Jeffrey Samuels – founding member



KEY LEARNING POINTS

- The key role that cooperatives can play for indigenous peoples and artists as a means of healing and identity recovery.
- Cooperatives provide opportunities not only for economic but also cultural and social empowerment at individual and collective level.
- Cooperative members, through collective action, can have an opportunity to challenge current perceptions about their identity and culture, build their own individual and collective identity, and foster resilience.
- Cooperatives provide space for collaboration and learning across generations that foster the sense of belonging to a community

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