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DJAARA upgrade to Prouses Rd Reserve fosters connection to Country

Dja Dja Wurrung enterprise DJANDAK has transformed the Prouses Road Recreation Reserve in North Bendigo into a welcoming gathering place that encourages everyone to connect with Country.

The reserve – which provides important green space for North Bendigo residents and Kalianna School students – had previously become better known for what it lacked than what it offered.

The redevelopment marks a new chapter for the site, transforming it into an attractive space for recreation, learning and connection – with new gathering spaces, landscaping, cultural interpretation, artwork and a yarning circle.

The upgrade was undertaken as part of DJANDAK's Balak Kalik Manya - Walking Together initiative, which is funded by Agnico Eagle.

Guided by Dja Dja Wurrung knowledge, Balak Kalik Manya recognises that healthy people and healthy Country are deeply interconnected – a concept that is backed by a growing body of scientific evidence.

Dja Dja Wurrung Group CEO Cassandra Lewis said she was proud of the value the space now offered the community.

"I hope this redevelopment helps the Prouses Road Recreation Reserve become a special place for the North Bendigo community to spend time outdoors, and connect with Country and community for generations to come," Ms Lewis said.

"These works are a reminder that caring for Country begins with knowing Country. When people feel connected to nature and place, they are more likely to care for and protect the environments around them.

Balak Kalik Manya is about creating spaces where people can build that connection with Country as part of everyday life. So, we're working in urban spaces, adding value to places that are close to where people live and play," Ms Lewis said.

The vision for the site was shaped by an advisory group of Dja Dja Wurrung knowledge holders called a **wartaka** (meaning 'come together with purpose'), with input from local residents, Kalianna School and Ironbark Gully Friends. On-ground works and landscaping were then completed by the DJANDAK Crew.

DJANDAK has delivered the works in collaboration with the City of Greater Bendigo, with funding from Agnico Eagle's Community Partnership Program.

Agnico Eagle Australia Director Environment and Sustainability Australia Felicia Binks said Agnico Eagle was pleased to support projects that create lasting benefits for the communities in which it operates.

“The completion of works at the Prouses Road Recreation Reserve is a wonderful example of what can be achieved when organisations come together with a shared commitment to community wellbeing, inclusion, and connection,” Ms Binks said.

“Through the Balak Kalik Manya – Walking Together program, this project has helped create an inviting and accessible space where people can gather, be active, and strengthen their connection to culture, Country, and one another.

“We are grateful to have partnered with DJANDAK and the many organisations involved in bringing this vision to life. We look forward to seeing the reserve enjoyed by the Bendigo community for many years to come.”

The upgrade follows the City of Greater Bendigo's 2024 playground works, creating a welcoming space for the whole community. The City of Greater Bendigo will continue to manage the reserve, ensuring its benefits are enjoyed by future generations.

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About Balak Kalik Manya (Walking Together)

Balak Kalik Manya is a DJANDAK-led initiative that combines Traditional Dja Dja Wurrung knowledge with contemporary science to create accessible, healthy and engaging natural spaces where people can connect with Country. Through partnerships, community involvement and place-based design, the program supports stronger connections between people and nature with the aim of improving both people’s wellbeing, and their care for Country.

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