

First Circles Members Experience Big Rivers Region

Workshop 2 – Building Leadership in Katherine

Over the course of the three-day workshop in Katherine, First Circles participants continued to grow their knowledge, strengthen key leadership skills, and deepen their capacity to lead in their communities.

A highlight of the workshop was a visit from the Hon. Jo Hersey MLA, local member for Katherine and a member of the Northern Territory Cabinet. Minister Hersey shared her personal story of life in Katherine and her journey into politics, emphasising the importance of resilience, adaptability, and the value of bringing diverse lived experiences to leadership roles.



Community engagement remained a central focus of the workshop. Members had the opportunity to visit the recently launched **Strongbala Mind Walk-In Talk-In Centre** - a culturally safe space offering mental health support grounded in both Aboriginal healing practices and mainstream care.



Guiding the visit were Strongbala staff Lazarus Manbulloo and Mavis Jumbiri, proud First Circles alumni from 2023 and 2018. They walked members through the centre, sharing insights into how Strongbala is working to create meaningful, culturally informed change in the Katherine community.

Workshop 2 was a powerful reminder of the strength found in connection to place, to people, and to purpose as members continued their leadership journey.



First Circles Manager and members with Jawoyn staff, Rangers and regional Aboriginal Liaison Officers at the new Strongbala Mind Walk-In Talk-In hub.

Throughout the workshop, members heard from keynote speakers and prominent figures from the Katherine community, who generously shared their leadership journeys, personal stories, and insights into creating positive change at the local level.

Thomas Archbold-Manning - Big Rivers Regional Executive Director, devoted his time to meet with the members and provided an in-depth look at leading regional teams across Government departments focusing on collaboration, cultural competence and strategic planning.

Christine Butler - NT Primary Health Network, shared her insights on perseverance and community service, particularly around the Katherine Justice Reinvestment (KJR) initiative.

Following Christine's presentation members visited the KJR team and shared experiences and stories around how we need to support our youth.



First Circles – Workshop 2 | Katherine

Workshop 2 in Katherine provided an incredible opportunity for members to strengthen their leadership journey and deepen their understanding of the region. Members established valuable connections with key figures and community leaders, gaining exposure to some of the important work happening on the ground across the Katherine region.

The workshop also focused on building critical skills and knowledge, with sessions covering:

- NT Cabinet – Understanding the central decision-making body
- Techniques for creating and running effective meetings
- Emotional intelligence and its connection to personal and community resilience
- Conflict management strategies
- How to give and receive constructive feedback

Members continued developing their Cabinet presentations, growing in confidence as they prepare to share their ideas and advocate for change at the highest levels.

Members enjoy BBQ Lunch at Katherine, Low Level



Stacey Davis and Tiwi Island Members, Lateesha Coombes and Patricia Puruntatameri.

It was a beautiful day in Katherine with our First Circles members enjoying a relaxing BBQ lunch at Low Level. With the sound of the river nearby and good food on the grill, it was the perfect way to unwind and connect with Country. Moments like these remind us of the importance of taking time out, sharing stories, and enjoying time with new friends.



Santa Teresa members, Stacey Davis and Veronica Peters enjoying the water views..

Alumni mentor and guest speaker

Alec Bidwee, 2024 Big Rivers member from Miali Brumby, spoke to current participants about his experience in the First Circles program. Alec shared how the program has empowered him professionally and personally particularly in his role as the President of the Garrak Bombers Football Club in Katherine. He reflected on how the skills and confidence he's gained have helped him lead and foster a strong and positive club environment.



Alec also shared insights from his Cabinet presentation last year, offering practical tips on managing nerves and staying focused when speaking to senior decision-makers.



2024 Alumni member, Alec Bidwee sharing his First Circles story

"Government wants to hear from you as leaders in your community, to help them better understand how they can work together with regions". Alec Bidwee

Workshop 3 convenes in Darwin

On Monday 14 July, First Circles members travelled to Darwin to take part in Workshop 3, another key step in the program and member's leadership journeys.

The week-long workshop commenced with an Acknowledgement of Country of the Larrakia people, recognising their ongoing custodianship of the land on which the workshop took place.

To open the session, members participated in a reflective group activity that explored the perceived enablers and barriers to becoming strong leaders in their communities. This activity encouraged open discussion, self-awareness and peer learning, as members identified both the personal and systemic factors that influence their growth as leaders.

Workshop 3 continues to build on the foundations laid in previous sessions, supporting members to strengthen their voice, increase their confidence and prepare to lead with purpose in their communities.



Keynote Speaker - Ameina Brunker

Ameina Brunker, a proud Maramanindji woman from Angutj Kirrim in the Daly River region, brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to Workshop 3.

With over 20 years working in Aboriginal affairs including in health, housing, governance, and electoral services. Ameina has contributed across Government, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and the non-Government sector.

Her keynote presentation, *“Heart-Centred Leadership – Advancing Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) to Inspire Change in Remote Communities”*, had a significant impact on program members. As a respected Aboriginal leader in the NT Public Sector, Ameina offered valuable insights into leading with empathy, cultural strength and deep community connection.

Her message resonated strongly with members, encouraging them to embrace leadership that is not only

strategic but also grounded in care, understanding, and cultural integrity.



First Circles Manager: Shaun Wilson, FC Member Terrence Wilson and Ameina Brunker, Director Community Led Harm Reduction Unit



Parliament House Visit and Legislative Assembly Tour

As part of Workshop 3 activities, the Aboriginal Partnerships and Reform (APR) unit hosted a special BBQ lunch on the scenic Darwin Esplanade. This informal gathering allowed APR staff and program members to share personal and professional stories, strengthening connections and fostering a sense of community within the group.

Following the lunch, members participated in a facilitated tour of Parliament House, led by the Department of the Legislative Assembly. The tour offered a valuable opportunity to deepen their understanding of government systems, parliamentary processes and the important relationship between the public sector and elected representatives.

This immersive experience provided members with practical insights into how decisions are made at the highest levels of government.



Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid Training

Workshop 3 placed a strong focus on Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid (AMHFA) training.

Over the course of two days, members deepened their understanding of social and emotional wellbeing while building essential mental health literacy skills.

This training equipped members with practical tools to recognise and support mental health challenges within their communities, fostering a culture of care, resilience, and connection.



Building Momentum and Empowerment

Workshops Two and Three of the First Circles Leadership program have been a resounding success. Members have deepened their engagement and significantly expanded both their knowledge and leadership skills.

It's inspiring to witness these emerging leaders not only growing in confidence but also supporting and empowering one another throughout the journey.

Their commitment to taking new knowledge and skills back to their communities demonstrates the lasting impact of the program and the future of leadership in the region.

Want to know more about First Circles?

Contact the Aboriginal Partnerships and Reform on: 08 8999 8579 or email: first.circles@nt.gov.au

Nominations for the 2026 First Circles Leadership Program will open soon. Expressions of interest will be accepted starting September 2025.

If you or someone you know is passionate about community leadership and ready to take the next step, stay tuned for more details on how to apply!