The dragonfly

The dragonfly is an important insect for many Aboriginal communities. Dragonflies are relevant to the Westmead precinct, as they are a symbols of transformation, movement and good health.

Elders, community members and staff have told us that dragonflies:

- Are a symbol of transformation
- Are fun and cheeky
- Are inquisitive - they want to know what's going on
- Are quick
- Travel across large distances
- Represent family gatherings and the importance of family
- Represent healthy environments, including water and air
- Represent healing and care - seeing a dragonfly can bring comfort during sad or stressful times

Read artist Leanne Tobin’s dragonfly story over the page. Watch an interview with Leanne on our YouTube channel.

The artwork

The dragonfly emerged as an important symbol for Westmead, following discussions with staff, Elders and the community. We were also told the community wanted local Aboriginal history and connection to the land, the natural environment and landscape, reflected in arts at Westmead.

This information was passed onto artist Leanne Tobin, who created an artwork (pictured left) called Dance of the Dragonflies. The artwork features five swirling dragonflies painted in vibrant blues and green on a background of stunning ochre colours.

Leanne Tobin with Dance of the Dragonflies

Closing the gap

The Westmead Redevelopment has launched its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legacy Strategy and Action Plan. The plan aims to address barriers to Aboriginal people accessing health services and leave a positive legacy.

The arts, including the engagement of Aboriginal artists, is one of may ways to make long-lasting change at Westmead. A soon-to-be-released Arts and Culture Strategy and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legacy Strategy and Action Plan aim to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel welcome, safe and connected in our new and refurbished spaces.

Download a copy of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legacy Strategy and Action Plan, and read about the arts strategy, on our website.
The dragonfly - what does it mean for Westmead?

Leanne on the dragonfly

“The dragonfly is a beautiful and vibrant creature and is a welcome visitor to many Aboriginal communities across Australia.

“Some Aboriginal communities see them as a cheeky sticky-beak, who always wants to know what’s happening - flitting in, and then zooming off to the next point of interest.

“Dragonflies remind us of family and the bringing together of families, as they are often seen together in groups around waterholes.

“Dragonflies signify good air quality, so if they’re around, it means you are in a healthy space.

“They share the important healing properties from various medicinal bush plants as they fly from one plant to another - like the doctors, nurses and pharmacists of our hospitals [who provide care to a range of patients].

“The artwork reflects the vibrancy and movement of the dragonflies, as they congregate and move through their journey of life. It serves as a reminder of the change, access and adaptability reflected in the transformation happening at Westmead today.”

Where you will see it

Leanne’s work Dance of the Dragonflies will be adapted on an ongoing basis and used in:

- Communications promoting this strategy
- Other close the gap initiatives
- The soon-to-be released Arts and Culture Strategy

About the artwork

Leanne used acrylics to paint directly onto a small canvas that is 41cm wide by 31cm high.

The colours used were inspired by colours commonly used in Westmead Redevelopment communications, Aboriginal artwork, as well as colours occurring in the natural environment.

Arts at Westmead

The Westmead Redevelopment’s Arts and Culture Strategy will be launched soon.

Read more about the arts at Westmead and how you can get involved: