

# Media Release



June 21, 2017

For immediate release

## Renaming ceremony for the Kempsey Women's Refuge

Next week, the Kempsey Women's Refuge will welcome local Aboriginal Elders and community representatives for a renaming ceremony to return the refuge to the women and children of the Macleay Region as a safe place for those needing to access support from Domestic and Family Violence and/or Homelessness services.

"The ceremony is an important opportunity to recognise and celebrate the partnership between Samaritans and the local Elders, to bring about positive outcomes for women and children in our community," Michelle Stocks, Samaritans Community Services Manager, said.

Samaritans participated in the Annual 'Yarn Up Camp' in collaboration with Goori Galbans and Aboriginal women from across the Mid North Coast, with the focus on redefining the Women's Refuge as a safe place where women and their children will be supported to address Domestic and Family Violence issues.

The service name is in the traditional Dhungutti language and has been chosen by the local Elders, to be revealed at the renaming ceremony.

Kempsey has twice the state's highest rates of Domestic and Family Violence in NSW and is ranked in the highest percentile of children being removed and placed into Statutory Care, representing significant risk in the community as well as an increased need for appropriate, quality supports to address the problem.

"For many years, women of the Kempsey region would be fearful to leave their partners who were perpetrators of Domestic and Family Violence as they were afraid that by speaking out or reaching out for help they could jeopardise their right to continue to care for their children. This fear, along with the economic impacts of fleeing their home and belongings, is often a major contributing factor to women remaining in violent relationships or sleeping in their cars," Ms Stocks said.

Over the last 12 months, Samaritans has worked extensively with the local community, in particular, the Aboriginal women and Elders, who are continually frustrated when witnessing their daughters, grandchildren and extended family refusing to seek help, resulting in poor and unsafe housing estates and continuing violent relationships.

"These women have committed to supporting the refuge service to bring real change for our community and help break down those barriers that women are fearful of," Ms Stocks said.

The Aboriginal women of the Macleay region have designed a canvas with the theme of 'The Healing Tree' and the Refuge will be renamed to represent a place of strength, healing and empowerment for women in the traditional Dhungutti language.

"We see this cleansing and healing ceremony as an integral step in highlighting to the women of our community that they have access to a safe place where they will be supported throughout their journey of trauma and recovery. This also means rapidly rehousing them with their children, with ongoing access to supports and services as required," Ms Stocks said.

**-ENDS-**

**Media Contact:** Michelle Stocks will be in attendance at the event on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June at 11am and media are invited at this time for photo and interview opportunities. The event will be held at the Kempsey Women's Refuge with entry via Hudson Lane (please do not take identifying photos of the service pre or post event for the safety of people using the service). Photos will be made available to media post event on request for those who cannot attend.

For more information and to advise your attendance, please contact Communication Coordinator, Laura Dawson, on 4960 7157 or 0438 475 772.