

Islander awareness on agenda



A WORKSHOP designed to encourage greater community awareness of Australian South Sea Islander history and ignite inspiration and connection in local youth is coming to Tweed Heads on October 29 and 30.

Headlined by rugby league star and *Koori Mail* columnist Preston Campbell, BLACK (Bold Leadership Awareness Cultural Knowledge) is aimed at people aged 17-30 from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds, and features rap, influential speakers and engaging workshops.

Similar events will be held in Mount Druitt, western Sydney, on October 22-23, featuring Aboriginal and South Sea Islander broadcaster Lola Forester.

Event organiser and Australian South Sea Islanders (Port Jackson) president Emelda Davis said the workshops would include sessions on leadership, Australian South Sea Islander and broader community culture, storytelling, panel discussions and live performances.

"The event will provide the opportunity to share diverse insights into education, training and wellness, including creating and sustaining a strong sense of community," she said.

"It will also be beneficial in confronting common challenges, developing leadership skills and promoting social enterprise."

Ms Davis said participants would glean inspiration and broader cultural understandings from the wealth of knowledge and repertoire of the speakers.

"We are encouraging all



Australian South Sea Islanders (Port Jackson) president Emelda Davis is one of the community leaders running BLACK workshops for young people in Mt Druitt and Tweed Heads this month.

Picture: No Coincidence Media/Nicholas Martinelli

community members to join us for this event, which also includes complimentary catering and wonderful networking opportunities," she said.

Ms Davis said South Sea Islander history in Australia was rich, and one that was largely

unknown despite the sacrifices and huge accomplishments made in the establishment of the sugar cane industry in Queensland.

"More than 62,000 individual South Sea Islanders, 95% of them men, were kidnapped,

tricked and coerced from Vanuatu, the Solomons and 80 surrounding islands starting in NSW in 1847, with the majority entering Queensland between 1860 and 1908," she said.

"Around 15,000, or 30% of these people, died due to lack

of immunity and maltreatment.

"Deceased estate wages were used to pay for the Commonwealth Government's inhumane mass deportation of up to 10,000 islanders under the White Australia Policy.

"Today, there are more than 50,000 descendants living in Australia, many residing on the Tweed, and theirs is a story that is vital for all Australians to understand and recognise."

The Australian South Sea Islander community has strong links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, given they worked in many of the same areas, were placed on some of the same missions – particularly on the east coast – and subject to the same oppressive laws.

They built direct bloodlines through marriages.

There are many close connections with the Torres Strait Islander community, as South Sea Islander people were taken into the Torres Strait from 1860 for the pearling and beche-de-mer industries as well as through the London Missionary Society. The most significant Australian South Sea Islander 'colony' is on Mua (St Paul's) Island in the Torres Strait, established by the Anglican Church in the 1900s.

Australian South Sea Islander people also worked closely with Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry.

The BLACK events are the first significant youth workshops funded by the NSW Government for an Australian South Sea Islander organisation.

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Cuts mean NT suicide lifeline lost



SUICIDE hotline Lifeline is closing its doors in Darwin after severe budget cuts from the Northern Territory Government. Territorians can

still call Lifeline's national phone network, but face-to-face counselling and engagement will stop.

As National Mental Health Week started last week, Lifeline Top End chairman Andrew Warton says it's a huge blow to the Territory, which has the highest suicide rates in the country and the highest youth suicide rates in the world.

The frontline call centre ran in the Darwin region for 10 years, but the former NT Government reduced its funding to \$200,000 a year last financial year. Mr Warton said the organisation needs \$450,000 to answer about 700 calls a month and has struggled to stay afloat.

"We sailed so close to the wind last financial year, it's physically not possible to do it again," he told

ABC radio. "We survived only for the grace of a lot of community support, sponsorship and fundraising."

NT Health Minister Natasha Fyles says the Government is still negotiating with Lifeline Australia.

"The \$200,000 is still on the table. That is more than adequate to provide the service to Territorians," she said.

"You didn't necessarily reach someone from the Northern Territory when you called Lifeline previously. It went through to a national call bank and it was flicked to an available counsellor."

● Readers seeking support and information about suicide prevention can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 or Kids Helpline (young people aged five-25) 1800 55 1800 78.

● Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support services can be found at www.naccho.org.au or www.sewbmh.org.au or www.healthinfonet.edu.edu.au