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Indigenous Culture Embraces Air Force Opportunities

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The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) is strengthening ties with Indigenous communities through programs that combine cultural pride with career pathways, exemplified by initiatives like the Indigenous Youth Program showcased at the 2025 Australian International Airshow. These efforts aim to inspire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to

explore Air Force roles while honouring their heritage. This article highlights how these programs bridge tradition and opportunity.

At the Australian International Airshow in March 2025, 19 Indigenous students from Victoria participated in the Indigenous Youth Program. Organised by Leading Aircraftman Christopher Timoti, the event provided hands-on experiences with flight simulators, aircraft displays, and drone racing, while showcasing diverse roles such as aviation firefighting and medical support. “The program opens doors for Indigenous youth to see Defence careers as attainable,” said Corporal Sewell-Blacklock in an interview with the National Indigenous Times. Interaction with Ryder, a retired military working dog, was a popular highlight, igniting enthusiasm among participants for roles including aviation firefighting.

Leading Aircraftman Andrew Hunter, active in South-East Queensland and the Torres Strait, exemplifies this cultural bridge. Coming from both saltwater and desert tribal backgrounds, Hunter conducts workshops at RAAF Base Amberley where he teaches youth about boomerang crafting and cultural storytelling through rock paintings. “It’s about connecting culture to opportunity,” he told Defence News, emphasising mentorship for Indigenous aviators who may feel disconnected from Country. His grand-uncle’s World War II heroism, including the capture of a Japanese pilot on the Tiwi Islands, reflects a proud legacy of Indigenous service.

While these initiatives are praised, some critics argue the broader reconciliation efforts under the Labor government—such as the stalled Voice to Parliament—lack substantive progress. However, the RAAF’s commitment is tangible. Flight Lieutenant Tjapukai Shaw’s C-130J Hercules landing in Brewarrina during Exercise Greenskin symbolised respect for Indigenous soldiers like Privates Harold West and George

Leonard. These efforts demonstrate the Air Force's focus on practical engagement rather than political posturing, offering Indigenous youth a meaningful pathway to serve while celebrating their heritage.