

# Networking Tranby project: Student Experiences around Glebe

## Mark Spinks



Mark Spinks, Babana Aboriginal Men's Group office, now in St John's Road, Glebe.

Mark comes from Bourke. He was raised up by his grandmother, Mrs Thelma Colless, on Bourke Reserve. Racism, bullying and violence were constant in the school, with one attack leaving Mark with a damaged eye and a stay at the Far West in Manly. Mrs Colless went into debt to get Mark a bicycle – he trained hard on it and his toughness led to him become the NSW State Cycling Champion.

His grandmother brought Mark to Dubbo in 1968 to do the School Certificate there. But money was short so he had to leave school then and get a job. Mark did not have the chance to pick up his schooling again 'til long after he came to Sydney. In the 1970s, he was living on the Block and working for Aboriginal Hostels, managing the Abercrombie Hostel where up to 70 people at a time might be staying. Many people in Hostels told him about Tranby and he took his chance to enrol in the Tertiary Preparation course in 1992.

'The opportunity came up with Tranby and I thought I might be able to finish the HSC.

I remember the excitement in the place, the people around the place. ...They used to feed everyone! That stuck with me because when we were kids in the bush, money was so scarce! So I thought this was amazing, everyone gets treated equally, everyone gets fed and there was that sense of family, extended family, which stuck with me....

Black fellas use a lot of humour and I do too, to get over the suffering that you encounter in your life.... So we use a lot of humour to get through that and I found that here at Tranby. I think that assisted each and every one of us that were here to get through that process of learning, that's my belief anyway.

I can sum up my time at Tranby very easily: it changed my life. Tranby was the catalyst!

After he graduated from Tranby, Mark went into a degree in Health Sciences at Sydney Uni, then passed the Public Service exams to become East Coast Indigenous Development Officer in Human Services. He has played a role in the Aboriginal Housing Company, is on the board of the Tribal Warrior and is always around in local events like Glebe NAIDOC.

But his most important role has been in the Babana Men's group which is involved in widely valued projects like the Coloured Diggers' March and a Suicide Prevention program.



Babana Group forum: 'Talking About Suicide' at Rodd Island, October 2015



Mark Spinks (right) at the Glebe NAIDOC Family Day in July 2015

'I'm not a protest guy. ... I'm more leaning to what my grandmother said, you know, "Use an olive branch. Get on with life and you can do it from the inside because there's going to be a lot of doors shut if you're doing that on the outside and those doors will never be opened. If you get in there you've got a chance to make some change." That's how I live anyway.'