

Women of Warren Shire

Karlene Irving

Karlene Irving is a former councillor, teacher, and community volunteer in Warren. She's dedicated to empowering youth, preserving local culture, and supporting projects like Warraan WiDji Arts to create lasting change.



If you've lived in Warren for even a short time, you've likely crossed paths with Karlene Irving - a former councillor, passionate teacher and tireless community volunteer. Whether she's inspiring students at the local school, volunteering with Warraan WiDji Arts, or leading the charge on the ANZAC Day service, she's one of those people who truly does it all.

Karlene's been part of the Warren community since 1989 and has made it her mission to empower the next generation, nurture local culture and connect people through her passion for service. She is currently heavily involved with Warraan WiDji Arts, where she's worked on restoring the Mechanics Institute building and supporting the revitalisation of the Wayilwan language.

When she's not working or volunteering, Karlene enjoys spending time outdoors, connecting with her community, and finding ways to support the next generation of leaders. A true force for good in Warren, Karlene is living proof that one person can make a lasting impact.

Quickfire questions...

1. A usual morning looks like...

A bit slow at first but quickly gaining momentum!

2. I'm most proud of...

The many children and youth of Warren, who I have known in the past and know today, who are not afraid to be leaders of change, to stand up and show up for what is right wherever they are; they are bold and brave.

3. On the weekend, you can find me...

Completing grant applications and acquittals, otherwise spending time outside as much as possible to have a break from IT devices!

4. A quote or piece of advice I live by is...

Don't judge a book by its cover, or even the first page... you need to read right to the end of the story and even then it could be the first book in a series!

5. How long have you lived in Warren Shire and what do you love most about living here?

Since February 1989 - nearly 36 years! My husband, Warwick Irving, and all the people of Warren – past and present.

6. Tell us about some of your favourite places to visit in the Shire.

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Any of the waterways at sunrise or sunset where the galahs, swans, brolgas and other water birds on Wayilwan Country are so prolific. The Gibson Way – driving through the marshes is amazing. I love also the Beemunnel –the Elders have made the Beemunnel a special place for all to enjoy and learn how to appreciate our Wayilwan cultural heritage in Warren Shire.

Some more about you...

You're well known for your involvement in the community, what initiatives are you currently a part of?

I have been honoured to be an inaugural Board member of Warren Performing Arts and Language Place Inc (Warraan WiDji Arts) and to work on the Board for the last three years. We have worked hard to restore and refurbish the Mechanics Institute building, generously donated by Frank and Marilyn Leach and funded through Creative Capital. As the project manager it is a privilege for me to be on the journey of restoring the historic building with some amazing people with an amazing vision. The vision is to have a space which is inclusive and safe, to grow diverse expressions of artistic creativity. The space allows Wayilwan language (a critically endangered language as classified by UNESCO) to be revived sustainably and meaningfully so that all the community can access it and appreciate our local cultural heritage. We are working with our Wayilwan Elders and knowledge holders, Warren Preschool Kindergarten, Warren Central School and St Mary's and other local organisations to revive Wayilwan language in our community through song, dance, stories and art. We aim to provide children the opportunity to be active contributors to the reawakening of Wayilwan language. We have an exciting partnership with Outback Arts to produce a music video of an original song in Wayilwan language. The NSW Aboriginal Languages Trust, NSW Department of Communities and Justice and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music are supporting our Language reawakening projects by funding an album of songs in Language (with English translations).

What inspires you to serve your local community?

I am inspired to serve my local community when I see an opportunity to make positive lasting change, where there is at least one other person who also sees the opportunity, where we can then together bring as many people as possible along on the journey of hope for a better future for our children and youth. This all stems from my strong faith in Jesus' power to still do the impossible today.

What's a hobby or activity you wish you had more time for?

Travelling to visit family and friends – locally, regionally, nationally and globally.

Finally, what piece of advice would you give to other women living in rural communities?

If you don't feel like you belong, don't give up, you just haven't found your place in the community yet and maybe you are the one who can create a space for others to feel like they belong. Everyone has value and purpose.