

# TEREESEA'S STORY

## AUSTRALIA

 [Watch Teresa's Story](#)



Tereesa outside Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation in Western Sydney.  
Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia

Tereesa, 27, a proud Gamilaroi woman, grew up in Western Sydney, born and raised on Darug land. A mother of four young children, she found it hard to find a stable home and provide for them on her own.

Tereesa's high school education was cut short when she became pregnant at 16. As a single mother, she was unable to afford rental properties for her family of four children. Her family frequently moved from one temporary accommodation to another, without a stable environment.

**"I was homeless. I didn't have a place to call home...my kids never had a connection to the community." Tereesa said.**

Determined to create a better future for her children, Tereesa discovered the Young Mums and Bubs Group at Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation, supported by Caritas Australia. Baabayn (which means 'Ancestral Woman' in Gumbaynggirr language) was founded by five elders and aims to support its community to heal from the past and nurture their sense of confidence and pride in the future.

"Baabayn is a place where people can come and gather. It's a belonging place. It's a place of culture, finding out about who your mobs are," said Auntie Jenny, one of the founders of Baabayn.

The Young Mums and Bubs Group supports young mothers to learn skills such as arts and craft, collective income-generation projects, parenting and financial literacy skills, as well as psychological support and connecting mums with government support services.

Baabayn also runs a Homework Club (which Tereesa's children participate in), a Yarn Circle, a Jarjums (children) Club and a Youth Group.

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With the help of Baabayn, Tereesa was able to access services such as psychological and housing support and driving lessons. Her family now have their own accommodation and a stable environment they can call home.

Growing up, Tereesa never had the opportunity to learn about First Nations Australian culture. But through Baabayn, she was able to hear stories from Indigenous Elders and reconnect with her culture.

Already an aspiring artist, Tereesa was able to flourish at Baabayn as she learnt Indigenous artwork and symbols. Her art was displayed and sold at local markets, and she is now working to start her own art business.

**"I'm relaxed, very relaxed when I'm painting. It helps me calm. I've been through a storm per se and painting, I just feel at peace. When I paint, every painting has a story. And my story is very long."**

Tereesa's artwork was recognised at the 2022 Vivid Light festival in Sydney. Vivid Light illuminates the city with art projected onto the city landscape. Four of Tereesa's artworks – *Crow Totem*, *Connections of Both Land & Water Tribes*, *Yinaar Miyayay (Women's Business)* and *Goanna Totem* – were projected onto the Wulugul Walk at Barangaroo.

"I've never been to Vivid and to have my artwork displayed is over the moon amazing. I never thought in a million years that this was something that would happen to me," Tereesa said.

Today, Tereesa is studying a certificate in Community Services so that she can strengthen her skills and give back to her community.

**"I've been a full-time mum since I was 16, but I had no qualifications and that's something I really wanted," Tereesa said.**

After volunteering at Baabayn, Tereesa was offered paid employment with the Youth Group. A few months later, she was also offered the role of assistant to the Mums and Bubs group.

Tereesa's children now produce their own artwork and are eager to learn more about First Nations Australian culture, history, and symbols.

**"I want my children to continue learning about their culture," Tereesa said. "I want them to have an involvement with the community. The community has your back. It's good to have that to lean on and I want my kids to realise that as well."**

With your support, the work of Baabayn can continue so that young mothers like Tereesa can keep their culture strong for future generations.



Photo: Richard Wainwright/  
Caritas Australia

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### TASK 1: Discussion

- A. What were some of the challenges faced by Teresa as a mother of four?
- B. How has Teresa been able to reconnect with her culture?
- C. How has your support of Caritas Australia helped enable Teresa to change her life?
- D. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Teresa's story?
- E. What have you learnt about the importance of First Nations Australians maintaining connection to their culture and community?

### TASK 2: Who are your support groups?

Through finding connection to her culture and community, Teresa was able to find the support she needed to create a better future for her and her children. Think about who makes up your community and support groups (e.g. Immediate and extended family, friends, school, sporting teams etc).

Display these in a concentric circle, with you positioned in the middle circle, and your support groups in the outer circles.

For each of the concentric circle groups, explain the role they play in providing support for you in various ways in your life.

Are there other support groups out there that you might be able to access? Do some research and find others in your local area!

### TASK 3: Sharing your story through art

For Teresa, art provides not only a connection to First Nations Australian culture, but a way for her to share the story of her life.

There are various art forms that we can use to tell our own story. Select one from the list below and create a piece of art that tells the story of your life. Display these around the classroom and host an art exhibition for another class.

- poem
- piece of music
- song
- painting/drawing
- comic or cartoon
- sculpture

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### A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW

*"I can do things you cannot,  
you can do things I cannot;  
together we can do great things."*

**Saint Teresa of Calcutta**

What connections can you make between Teresa's story and the quote above?

[Luke 11:5-13](#)

Read the above scripture passage.

Explain what this parable reveals about the importance of persistence and working towards what you want?