



Locals and visiting members of the Australian Girls Choir united to sing a range of songs, including hymns, in Lockhart River as part of a reverse travel program.

# Lockhart opens hearts and minds

By CHISA HASEGAWA

EXPERIENCING Indigenous culture through music and dance in Lockhart River has given one Adelaide singer the drive to integrate a sense of community into her choir.

Through the reverse travel program by Girls from Oz (G-oz), 12 singers from the Australian Girls Choir (AGC) were chosen to perform and experience life in Lockhart River this Reconciliation Week.

G-oz is a not-for-profit organisation that gives youth in remote communities access to high-quality performing arts education, and the AGC holds fundraisers throughout the year to help make it happen.

AGC member Ceilidh Welsh said immersing herself in the Lockhart River community had been an “eye-opening” experience.

“Just being able to see what we’re actually doing these fundraisers for has been really eye-opening,” she said.

“Coming here and seeing the impact that we make, not from the outside but from the inside, has been absolutely beautiful.”

As well as teaching the kids choral works and performing for the community, Ms Welsh said it was also exciting to learn a few traditional songs from the children.

“We don’t usually sing Aboriginal hymns, so it’s been interesting to note the differences in how the AGC sings and how community



Moving towards reconciliation: The Australian Girls Choir and Lockhart River share culture and smiles through music.

sings together,” she told *Cape York Weekly*.

The singer said she wanted to take the sense of community she felt when the Lockhart River children sang together back to the AGC.

“Instead of going through the motions of a song, just really trying to understand where we are, who we’re with, and why we’re doing it,” Ms Welsh said.

“The community is just incredible here; it’s loving and beautiful, and it’s amazing to have that feeling while singing and knowing that you’re grateful to be there.”

G-oz general manager Kylie Lee-Archer said providing young people with an opportunity to see life outside their norm was integral to the program.

Once a year, girls from Lockhart River get the chance to travel to

one of the capital cities to perform with the AGC as part of G-oz’s travel program.

For the reverse travel program, which has been running for the past three years, girls travelled to the eastern Cape York community from Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane and Canberra.

“It’s a core part of the program for Lockhart River girls to go to the city, but we think it’s also real-

ly important for the city girls, lots of whom have many privileges, to come and see life in Lockhart,” Ms Lee-Archer said.

“They are in the AGC, so that’s already something that remote kids can’t access very easily, but they might also do swimming or ballet or debating, and all those extracurricular activities that remote communities simply don’t have access to. But it’s also valuable to see all of the things that Lockhart River does have, like a beautiful environment and an amazing connection to culture.”

Ms Lee-Archer said the reverse travel program was timed with Reconciliation Week because seeing and understanding was a crucial first step to a reconciled path forward.

“Experiencing each other’s cultures, seeing each other’s lives, and getting that two-way perspective is so important,” the G-oz general manager said.

“I think in Australia, the more important one is for us city white-fella to learn; we are the ones who need to learn about Indigenous culture, about community life, and about what it’s like to be remote from the city.

“The AGC girls will go home, talk to their friends and families about all the strengths that they saw, and hopefully might change some people’s preconceived opinions about Aboriginal people and communities.”

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