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The race is on to save Indigenous languages and the Hunter is leading the way...

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Daryn McKenny from the Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association teaches students their local indigenous language. (Karen Shrosbery)

Grandmother Aunt Phyllis is learning to speak Arwarbukarl for the first time - the local indigenous dialect once spoken here in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie district before it disappeared.

To her knowledge, her father was one of the last known speakers, but when he died, so did his language and like many other Arwarbukarl descendants she has little recollection of dialect once heard on this land.

But that's about to changethanks to a small team of researchers and linguists in Newcastle, future generations will have the opportunity to speak it again. And Aunt Phyllis is one of those learning from scratch.

"When it is written and you've got to learn it, it's not as easy as somebody speaking - but I will learn! Every time I learn something in Arwarbukarl, when my kids are down here, they take off with it - they are younger and in a learning stage," Aunt Phyllis says.

According to the Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association (ACRA), every two weeks in the world a language disappears. The organisation hopes that the indigenous languages of Australia don't add to those statistics and that's why it is using all the research tools available including the latest technology, to resurrect the spoken word and reconstruct the language best it can.

Each week the team at ACRA discovers a new phrase, learns the pronunciation of a new word or manages to reconstruct a new sentence - each is a step closer to building up a database of vocabulary that's been dormant for years. It's a voyage of discovery as all they have are texts, reference books and audio tapes, and no one to teach them. All the work though is finally being paid off - just recently they have published their first Arwarbukarl language Learning Guides and Dictionaries. But that's just the beginning.

Daryn McKenny one of the founders of ACRA says it has been a long process to resurrect the language, "People say its extinct, but its not extinct - it's just resting - it will come back once again".

ACRA believes that preserving the culture, language and history will in turn will strengthen their Aboriginal identity.

ACRA initially serves the Hunter region, but its influence spreads further afield and this is all because of the creation of unique computer programme called Miromaa, designed by ACRA. "Miromaa" in the Arwarbukarl language means "Saved" - it was developed to aid Aboriginal language work providing an easy to use database consisting of text, audio, images and video.

Daryn and the team now assist other indigenous communities around the country who sign up to the technology and delivering language training. The program has been so successful that ACRA hope to extend the idea and launch the first ever national website for Aboriginal Languages in Australia later this year.

ACRA has continued to be recognised for its innovation - last year it took the runner up prize in Microsoft Australia's Innovative Technology Training Awards. Also this year it will be taking part in an international conference about Stabilising Indigenous Languages in the United States - which could lead to helping out indigenous languages around the world.

The work that ACRA is undertaking is significant on so many levels, but perhaps the biggest impact is on the individual. For Aunt Phyllis it's a dream come true, as she says - "if it wasn't for technology the language would be kept in a little room and nobody would learn it - all over the world you can get our language."

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