Redfern is on track to becoming a revitalised residential, commercial and cultural centre, as judicial officers learned on a recent visit to the inner city community. The Judicial Commission’s Ngara Yura Committee organised the visit for judicial officers to meet with community leaders, Elders and the Redfern Police Commander at the smart, multi-purpose Redfern Community Centre and the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence.

The visitors heard from Michael Mundine, Chair of the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), about the AHC’s vision to redevelop “The Block” after 30 years of social problems and an entrenched drug culture. After years of planning, the vision has culminated in the Pemulwuy Project, a $70 million redevelopment awaiting the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure’s final approval.

The Pemulwuy Project, named after the 18th century Aboriginal warrior, will see a mixed-use redevelopment with affordable residences for Aboriginal families and students, commercial and retail shops, cafes, an art gallery, a child care centre, open space for artwork and community functions, and landscaping. Since November 2010, former residents of “The Block” have voluntarily relocated, dilapidated houses have been demolished, and drug-dependent people have been removed. Drug dependency and Redfern’s crime rate has dramatically reduced since 2009 in large part due to the relationship that has developed between the community and the local police. The judicial visitors heard from Shane Phillips, Chief Executive of the Tribal Warrior Association (TWA), and Superintendent Luke Freudenstein of the Redfern Local Area Command, about the renewed spirit of cooperation that centres on boxing and fitness training between young people and police, community events, a mentoring program run by the TWA that brings young people into positive contact with the police, and cultural training for newly appointed officers to the Redfern Local Area Command. Various Aboriginal organisations work together in the community with the primary aim to ensure that Redfern’s Aboriginal people take control of their lives. Many people commence involvement in community programs because of court orders, but voluntarily continue long after obliged.

After a tasty lunch featuring Indigenous food provided by Suzanne Grech, Suzanne’s brother Corey outlined the “Kool Purple Kookas” program that provides opportunities for young Aboriginal people to learn cooking skills, particularly in traditional foods. The aim is to empower young Aboriginal people to be healthy by eating nutritious food and develop skills to provide economic independence, satisfaction and pride.

Shane Phillips made a plea for outside support for the Aboriginal enterprises in Redfern and particularly judicial support in recommending referral of appropriate people to the various mentoring and training programs discussed during the day.

Judicial officers may refer appropriate Aboriginal candidates for mentoring or supervision by local organisations, such as the TWA and Babana Men’s Group, as conditions of bail or conditions of good behaviour bonds, usually with Probation and Parole Service supervision (see the article “Mentoring Indigenous young people: the Tribal Warrior program” in (2011) 23 Judicial Officers’ Bulletin 5 and the list of programs in the “Services Directory” on JIRS).

* Words by Kate Lumley, Publishing Manager and His Honour Judge Stephen Norrish QC, Chair of the Ngara Yura committee.