

In the time before time, when the Ancestors walked the earth, they bestowed upon the land a deep connection with health and life. The land itself was a living spirit, nourishing its people, and within this sacred connection, the first healers emerged. These healers—guided by the spirits and the land—were given the knowledge to care for their people, balancing body, mind/ and spirit. Their hands held the power to heal, nurture life, and guide the sick through the circle of life, birth, and death.

At the heart of this sacred circle stood two healing hands, representing the role of the healers—those chosen to care for their communities, much like today's nurses and midwives. These hands cradled the circle of life, a never-ending cycle that connects all living beings to the earth, to each other, and to the future. They brought health and protection, guided by the wisdom of the stars and the land itself.

In the centre of the circle was the Mother of Life, the figure of a pregnant woman whose connection to the land ensured the safe passage of new souls into the world. She represented the sacred role of midwives, who, like her, cared for the journey of birth, nurturing both mother and child as part of the endless life cycle. The spiral within her womb reflected the beginning of life's journey, guided by the wisdom of the Ancestors.

James Cook University (JCU) students, who are training to become modern healers, carry forward this ancient tradition. They walk a path that intertwines with the ancient stories of the land, and through their studies, they learn to give health and protect life. The DNA helix woven into the artwork symbolizes the blending of ancient wisdom with modern science. This helix, which encircles the artwork, represents the knowledge of genetics and the biological understanding of health, linking the past to the future of healthcare.

As each cohort of JCU students walks this path, they leave behind footprints, which mark their journey of learning and giving health. These footprints symbolize the continuous flow of students—just as one generation leaves, another follows, stepping into the same circle of learning and healing. Each footprint is connected to the land, representing the strong ties JCU students have with their community and the natural environment. Their path is guided by those who came before, yet they also forge new ways, leaving their mark for future healers.

Dreamtime Story of Healing Hands, Life's Circle, and the Path of Students

Destiny McDonald (JCU, 2025)

The gathering circles in the artwork symbolize the meeting places where students, teachers, and communities come together. These circles reflect the collaborative spirit of learning at JCU, where knowledge is shared, and new healers are born. Inside the circles, X and Y chromosomes represent the men and women who walk the path of health care, linked to the diversity of students and the equal importance of both genders in providing care.

For the midwives, the role of the pregnant woman in the artwork is central. She symbolizes the life-giving role of midwifery, guiding new life into the world and supporting mothers through the sacred act of birth. The midwives, like the ancient healers, help nurture and protect this new life, ensuring that the circle of life continues unbroken.

As JCU students, the journey is one of both learning and giving. The cross symbol in the centre of the artwork embodies their role in safeguarding the health of their communities. They are trained not only in the classrooms but also through hands-on experience in the field, learning to balance scientific knowledge with the care and compassion of traditional healers. They walk a path illuminated by the stars of knowledge and guided by the wisdom of the Ancestors.

In their giving of health, the students of JCU, whether in nursing or midwifery, connect both to the ancient wisdom of the land and to the future of healthcare. Their hands, like those of the Dreamtime healers, carry the sacred responsibility of care, ensuring that the circle of life continues, from birth to death, generation after generation.

This combined Dreamtime story reflects the sacred and enduring connection between JCU students, the ancient tradition of healing, and the holistic role of nurses and midwives. The symbolism of the DNA helix, X and Y chromosomes, and footprints integrates modern learning with the deep cultural significance of health and life, while the gathering circles represent the community and shared knowledge that JCU fosters. This story beautifully honors the role of students in continuing the sacred journey of giving health.

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