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## White skin and red hair doesn't mean I'm not a proud Aboriginal man

By Michael James

Posted Wed 13 Dec 2017, 5:28am

Updated Fri 31 Aug 2018, 2:58pm

Image:

ABC Illawarra: Justin Huntsdale

### Heywire winner Michael James, Husskison, NSW

Wada, that means hello.

I'm a young Indigenous man from the south coast of New South Wales.

While growing up, I was faced with a different kind of racism.

I have always been proud of being Aboriginal, but people have always told me that I'm not.

They would say that I'm too white and I have red hair — and that these features mean I can't be Indigenous.



Red-haired and pale-skinned Michael James celebrates his Indigenous culture on the South Coast of NSW.

Image:

ABC Illawarra: Justin Huntsdale

But luckily, I'm not very good at listening to people who tell me things that I don't want to hear.

So, straight away I think of a way to show my Aboriginal background either through art, didgeridoo playing, language, stories, culture, and Aboriginal songs and dances.

I've created artworks for my friends and family and I've taught other students how to circular breathe while playing a didgeridoo.

I know a few words in my local languages and I am learning more through the elders in our community.

Yuinie, which means man.

Maramara, this is fish.

Mirrigan, which is dog.

When I was young I would listen to my aunties and uncles teaching me the stories about how Aboriginal people have been living here since the dreaming.

I have created tools, weapons and a didgeridoo in the traditional way, and I dance with my boys on special occasions such as NAIDOC week and meetings.

I love my culture and one day I'll be an Indigenous elder in my community.

I just can't wait.

I want to help people, the same ways that elders have helped me.

I will teach them the things that I know, and share the stories and skills I've learnt.

And one day when someone tells them that they are not Indigenous, they can then prove that they are through our culture.

I'm only 17, but I already know what I must do to contribute to this outstanding country.

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