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OUR SPORTING GREATS

MURRI AND AILAN ATHLETES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

WILLIE PRINCE

TRACK STAR AND PARALYMPIC TORCHBEARER

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State Library
of Queensland



Queensland
Government

WILLIE PRINCE

Queensland track and field champion and 2000 Paralympic torchbearer Willie Prince is a constant warm and well-recognised presence at State Library of Queensland (SLQ), where he has worked for over thirty years. This year Willie is a Gold Coast Commonwealth Games Queen's baton bearer.

Wilfred Thomas Prince was born at the Cherbourg Aboriginal Mission in 1960. He suffered illnesses during childhood and a physical disability left him wheelchair bound. Despite many challenges faced in his upbringing, he was destined to become a high achiever on and off the track.

When he was in his early twenties, Willie went along to his friend's wheelchair race, and soon became involved in the sport; training on the track at the QE11 Stadium on the weekends, and in the gym three times a week. He was a member of the Queensland Sporting Wheelies in the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, and represented Queensland eleven times in national and transnational competitions in wheelchair racing (50m, 100m, 200m, 400m and 800m), shot put, discus and



*Willie Prince in his 2018 Commonwealth Baton Bearer relay uniform holding a photograph of himself carrying the 2000 Paralympic torch, 2018.
Photo by Joe Ruckli.*

club throw. A collection of his medals, ribbons and other memorabilia are currently on display at the Ration Shed Museum in Cherbourg.

Willie competed in the New Zealand Nationals in Auckland twice. One memorable win didn't get off to the best start. As the other five competitors raced ahead out of the starting bloc, what had sounded like the firing gun was actually Willie's tyre. Neither Willie or his Australian teammates had the right replacement tube, so help had to come from a New Zealander competitor. There were no hard feelings when Willie crossed the line first; in fact, Willie remembers comradery and humour between athletes.

The 2000 Paralympic Sydney Games were the first to be held outside the Northern Hemisphere. Willie carried the Paralympic torch on the streets of Brisbane in 2000, passing waving colleagues at SLQ's then wool store location in Teneriffe.

He is an Ambassador with the Red Dust Heelers, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wheelchair basketball team in the National Wheelchair Basketball League, and mentors future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wheelchair sport stars.

A proud Kalkadoon person, Willie is very proactive in both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the disability sector. He has a key role in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland, as well as serving on numerous boards in the community.