

# Reconciliation News

Stories about Australia's journey to equality and unity

## Uncle Archie Roach remembered

Knowledge holder.  
Storyteller. Truth-teller.

## The best in the business

Success and excellence  
at the Indigenous  
Governance Awards

## Voice to Parliament

Historic opportunity for  
reconciliation is here

**COMMUNITY CONTROL**  
**SELF-DETERMINATION IN ACTION**

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RECONCILIATION  
AUSTRALIA

*Reconciliation News* is published by Reconciliation Australia in May and October, informing and inspiring readers with stories on becoming a more just, equitable and reconciled nation.

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Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation promoting reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Visit [reconciliation.org.au](http://reconciliation.org.au) to find out more.

### Cover image:

*Uncle Archie Roach performing live with Tiddas, at the National Reconciliation Week 2018 launch, at the Canberra Theatre Centre. Photo: Sean Davey*

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# FROM THE CEO

In May I watched overjoyed as a record number of Aboriginal politicians were elected to our 47th Federal Parliament.

A triumphant photo (p.6) commemorates the historic moment: nine of the eleven representatives stand outside Parliament House, from all sides of the political spectrum and many different Nations between them. All are grinning, widely.

It is a moving image, full of optimism and pride; but celebrating this moment is not just about the optics.

It's about recognising the benefits that come when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, leadership and agency are built into our decision-making bodies – especially when those decisions affect First Nations communities.

These benefits were evident at the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards in June, where we celebrated the successes of Indigenous-led organisations making crucial decisions on behalf of their communities, every day.

As such, this edition of Reconciliation News is inspired by the Awards and focuses on the vital importance of Aboriginal Community Control – a fundamental part of the right to self-determination.

Read these inspiring stories of strength, struggle and success from the winners and highly commended organisations from this year's Awards (p.12-19).

The 2022 finalists displayed not only exceptional examples of leadership, but also agency and self-determination; passion and love for their communities and their organisations.

These are not just stories of the organisations who were finalists, but stories repeated right across the country including in our classrooms and schools.

Biripi principal of Briar Road Public School in NSW, Tammy Anderson (in conversation on p.20), exemplifies what can be achieved when community members take the lead in educational settings.

Nationally, the Voice to Parliament, as proposed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, is now firmly back on the agenda.

It is a simple proposition: that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should have a say in the decisions that affect our lives and communities.

This draws the principles of community control on to the national stage – read more about where we are headed, in *Historic Opportunity for Reconciliation is here* (p.10) by the eminent Professor Peter Yu AM.

Many observed the irony that, during a period when significant progress is being made on developing a Voice to Parliament, we lost one of our greatest voices.

But in Uncle Archie Roach we have a quintessential example of how powerful and unwavering a voice can be. We take a look at his legacy through the eyes of a young Aboriginal musician, in *Uncle Archie Roach, Remembered by Rhyan Clapham* (p.22).

And speaking of a legacy, in *'We wanted something for ourselves': The Koori Knockout turns 50* (p.24), Nakari Thorpe looks at the sporting event's history and its contribution to community.



CEO Karen Mundine. Photo: Joseph Mayers

When I last wrote this message, I echoed our National Reconciliation Week theme stressing the need for us all to *Be Brave and Make Change*: to dig deep, stay motivated and use the tools and education available to be brave while creating a more just and equitable Australia.

Reflecting on the changes and brave actions we have seen in the short time since, as well as the challenges we have in front of us, reminds us of one central fact. A truly reconciled Australia which we all strive for, will not be realised until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations, at all levels, are self-determining and making decisions for ourselves, by ourselves.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen".

**Karen Mundine**  
Chief Executive Officer

# UPCOMING EVENTS



## Indigenous Business Month

1–31 October 2022

A strong and thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business sector is a crucial part of building self-determination and agency – providing positive role models and improving quality of life for First Nations communities.

This is what Melbourne Business School's MURRA Indigenous Business Master Class Program promotes through its annual Indigenous Business Month.

Now in its eighth year, the 2022 Indigenous Business Month theme – *Actions Today, Impact Tomorrow* – speaks to the next generation of First Nations business leaders as well as showcasing current business achievements.

The theme encourages First Nations business owners and non-Indigenous allies to look at their actions today and think about how they will impact our future.

For more information or to register your event, visit: [indigenousbusinessmonth.com.au](https://indigenousbusinessmonth.com.au)

*Indigenous Business Month co-founders L-R: Mayrah Sonter, Dr Michelle Evans, Leesa Watego. Photo: Jorge de Araujo, Artificial Studios*



## NAATSIHWP National Conference

10–11 November 2022

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and practitioners play a vital role in frontline efforts to protect their communities.

The National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP) promotes the value of these workers, and their contributions to positive sustainable health, education, employment outcomes, and greater autonomy and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

The association's National Conference provides a significant opportunity to showcase and honour the vital work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners.

Learn more about the NAATSIHWP National Conference: [naatsihwp.org.au/2022-naatsihwp-national-conference](https://naatsihwp.org.au/2022-naatsihwp-national-conference)

*NAATSIHWP's National Conference honours the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers. Photo: supplied*



## Reconciliation in Education Awards open

30 January 2023

The Narragunnawali Awards are the first national awards program in Australia to recognise and celebrate education environments implementing outstanding reconciliation initiatives.

Finalist schools and early learning services are acknowledged for the ways in which they strengthen relationships, build respect, and provide meaningful opportunities in the classroom, around the school or early learning service, and with the community.

The Awards open Monday 30 January 2023 – so nominate a school or early learning service which has made a significant contribution to advancing reconciliation through their work.

To learn more about the awards visit: [narragunnawali.org.au/awards](https://narragunnawali.org.au/awards)



## Partjima - A Festival in Light

7–16 April 2023

Partjima is the meeting place where old meets new. It is the only authentic Aboriginal light festival of its kind, showcasing the oldest continuous culture on Earth through the newest technology – all on the 300-million-year-old natural canvas of the MacDonnell Ranges in Central Australia.

Each year this free event celebrates the ways in which artists evolve and experiment with different styles and materials, while staying true to Country and culture.

Partjima is held on Mparntwe (Alice Springs), which is connected to the estates of Mparntwe, Antulye and Irlpme. Visitors are invited to experience Partjima, and watch the desert come alive with new artworks, light shows and a program of performances, interactive workshops, music, films, and talks.

To learn more about Partjima visit: [partjimaaustralia.com.au](https://partjimaaustralia.com.au)

*The Eagle's Eye installation at Partjima features various works by Warlpiri artist, Jeannie Nungarrayi Egan, with this one being 'Bush Tobacco Dreaming'. Photo: supplied*

# RECONCILIATION RECAP



**New Government**  
21 May

The reconciliation movement has always had multi-party support, and this is set to continue with an increased number of First Nations people across the new parliament, bringing us hope for brave action.

A record number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives have been elected to parliament, including four new Indigenous representatives, three of whom are women.

This includes the Hon Linda Burney MP and Senator Malarndirri McCarthy as Minister and Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians respectively, and Senator Patrick Dodson as Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement.

Progress on reconciliation is what will bond our country together and set the foundation for a more just and equitable nation. Reconciliation Australia looks forward to working with the new Government to help move these agendas forward.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the 47th Parliament of Australia: L-R Jacinta Price, Gordon Reid, Jana Stewart, Kerryne Liddle, Malarndirri McCarthy, Linda Burney, Pat Dodson, Dorinda Cox, Jacqui Lambie. Missing from photo: Lidia Thorpe and Marion Scrymgour. Photo: Mike Bowers/Guardian Australia*



**2022 Indigenous Governance Awards**  
8 June

Since 2005, the Indigenous Governance Awards has showcased some of the best and brightest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led innovation, ingenuity, skill, and excellence.

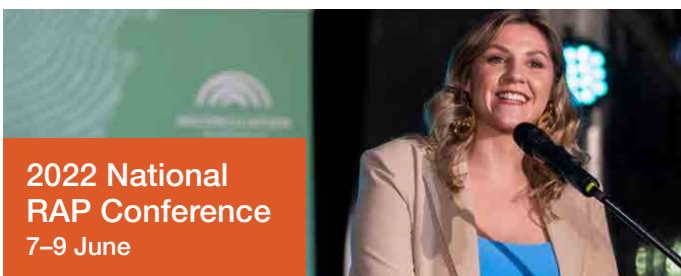
After countless postponements, re-scheduling and pivots over the past two years, the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards were announced at a gala dinner, with over 400 guests gathering to celebrate the success and excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations.

ABC journalist and presenter Dan Bouchier hosted the awards, with highlights including a heart-rending performance from the late Uncle Archie Roach and his quartet, and a full-hearted speech from new Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Linda Burney MP.

Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council Human Research Ethics Committee (AH&MRC HREC); Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council; and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation (Wungening) took out the three awards on the night. Read more about the winners and finalists on pages 12-19.

To learn more about the winners and finalists visit: [indigenousgovernance.org.au](https://indigenousgovernance.org.au)

*Host Dan Bouchier during the smoking ceremony, performed by Brendan Kerin (Metro LALC) at the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards. Photo: Joseph Mayers*



**2022 National RAP Conference**  
7-9 June

The 2022 National RAP Conference, *Brave Together*, brought together over 700 RAP organisation employees, policymakers, academics and community members at the International Convention Centre in Sydney.

The conference was hosted by Jerrinja journalist Shahni Wellington, and included an inspiring keynote address from Professor Peter Yu AM and a moving speech by Senator for Western Australia and Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement, Patrick Dodson.

Each day was packed with of plenary and breakout sessions, focussing on learning and collaboration across the RAP network.

Read more of what you missed at: [reconciliation.org.au/2022-rap-conference](https://reconciliation.org.au/2022-rap-conference)

*MC and Jerrinja woman Shahni Wellington speaking to guests during the first night of the 2022 National RAP Conference. Photo: Joseph Mayers*

## Racism. It Stops With Me

12 July

**RACISM.  
IT STOPS  
WITH ME**

The Australian Human Rights Commission's *Racism. It Stops With Me* campaign has been a driving force in our national conversation on race and racism since its advent in 2012. As of July, the Commission has relaunched the campaign with new tools and resources, using extensive consultation with and feedback from people with lived experience of racism as their basis.

The campaign invites us to ask ourselves important questions about the role of racism in shaping society, the way we see ourselves and how we interact with one another. Featuring well-known ambassadors, the campaign builds awareness of how racism operates at both a structural and interpersonal level and gives people tools to recognise and address it.

It also acknowledges that First Nations peoples and others with lived experience of racism have been leading anti-racism in Australia for centuries and calls on more Australians to reflect on their responsibility and take action.

To learn more, visit: [itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au](https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au)



**NAIDOC Week 2022**  
3–10 July

NAIDOC Week is an annual Australia-wide celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strength, excellence, culture and achievements. The eye-catching poster, *Stronger*, designed by Gudanji and Wakaja woman Ryhia Dank, encapsulates the 2022 theme *Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!* – a rallying cry and a celebration of First Nations people who took a stand in the past and those who do so today.

The highlight of the week was the National Awards Ceremony, this year held in the 2022 focus city, Narm (Melbourne), on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation.

The prestigious black-tie event was hosted by television presenter Shelley Ware and comedian Steven Oliver, with the Awards recognising ten exceptional high achievers within their distinctive fields, including Female Elder of the Year Aunty Lois Peeler; Male Elder of the Year Uncle Jack Charles; Lifetime Achievement Award Uncle Stan Grant Sr; and Person of the Year Ash Barty.

To learn more about NAIDOC Week 2022 visit: [naidoc.org.au](https://naidoc.org.au)

*2022 National NAIDOC Week Award winners. L-R: Elijah Manis, The Koori Mail (Tracey King, Trevor Kapeen, Naomi Moran), Walter Jackson, Dr Lois Peeler AM, Lowell Hunter. Photo: National NAIDOC Committee*



**Garma Festival 2022**  
29 July–1 August

The Garma Festival returned to Yolngu Country in northeast Arnhem Land, with the theme *Nhana Nathilyurra*, or look ahead towards the future.

The festival is a significant cultural exchange event, celebrating and sharing the cultural traditions of Yolngu people. It also brings together business leaders, academics and journalists to discuss the most pressing issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Among the prominent First Nations and non-Indigenous leaders in attendance this year was Prime Minister Anthony Albanese who made an historic speech proposing a possible referendum question: *Do you support an alteration to the Constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?*

The festival included discussions on education, health and leadership as well as the youth forum, traditional Bunggul (Yolngu ceremonial dance) each evening, cultural workshops and musical performances.

Go to [garma.com.au](https://garma.com.au) to learn more.

*Galpu baby in traditional painting. Photo: Jeanie Govan, Yothu Yindi Foundation*

# NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK 2022: BACK TOGETHER

**After two years of lockdowns, postponements, interstate relocations and adapting to life online, new life was breathed into the reconciliation movement as National Reconciliation Week this year was filled with in-person activity, events and supporters coming together.**

Each year from 27 May to 3 June, National Reconciliation Week is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia.

This year's theme, *Be Brave. Make Change*, challenged all Australians – individuals, families, communities, organisations, and government – to Be Brave and tackle the unfinished business of reconciliation so we can *Make Change* for the benefit of all Australians.

Reconciliation is everyone's business and nowhere is that more obvious than the National Reconciliation Week events calendar.

In every state and territory, small and large organisations, community groups, schools and workplaces were marking the week with screenings, art, performance, walks, discussions, sports, story times, seminars, and breakfasts, lunches and dinners!

The Australian Reconciliation Network – comprising state and territory-based reconciliation organisations – led the way hosting and assisting local, community-focussed events and activities.

Reconciliation Queensland held its National Reconciliation Week Breakfast Launch at the Queensland Parliamentary Annexe, which was broadcast live to a regional Reconciliation Breakfasts across the state. CEO Erin Lang was

ANTaR Armidale's annual NRW Bridge Walk.  
Photo: Patsy Asch





on a panel hosted by Stan Grant on *Allyship in Reconciliation* and members attended the unveiling of the dedicated State Memorial to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service men and women, among other events.

Reconciliation NSW kicked off the week with a message from their Biripi/Worimi Board Member Kayla White, asking us to all to 'go forward together', in her language Gathung. They were at events from the Indigenous Veteran's Commemoration Ceremony on Gadigal Country, to the annual Armidale ANTaR Bridge Walk. They also hosted the *NSW Leaders in Conversation – Unpacking the Uluru Statement* at NSW Parliament House, as well as their signature event, *I'm not racist but...*

This year Reconciliation WA took their annual breakfast across the state, virtually. Hosted at WA Museum Boola Bardip in Boorloo (Perth), the breakfast featured a keynote from Stan Grant, a panel discussion and special sections for schools and early learning services. Fred Chaney's *Reconciliation Memoirs* was launched, and the week finished on the energy that is the annual Walk For Reconciliation at Kaarta Koomba (Kings Park).

In the only state or territory that celebrates a public holiday for reconciliation, the ACT Reconciliation Council hosted Reconciliation Day at the National Arboretum on Monday 30 May. More than 4,000 people braved the challenging weather and took part in workshops and activities, as well as being treated to a number of cultural and musical performances.

The Adelaide Convention Centre (Kaurna Yerta) was once again host to Reconciliation SA's annual National Reconciliation Week Breakfast. The event was MC'd by Luke Carroll, with live performances by Tjarutja Dance



*Smoking Ceremony at the Reconciliation QLD NRW 2022 Breakfast Launch, Qld Parliamentary Annexe. Photo: Lewis Bin Doraho*



*The sea of hands at Reconciliation in the Park in Canberra. Photo: Davey Barber, courtesy of Events ACT*

Collective and Miiesha, as well as a panel discussion. Reconciliation SA's events culminated with the spectacular and free *Nguyanguya muri wamangka (Reconciliation in the Park)* concert, featuring six acts and headlined by Baker Boy.

Hobart, Devonport and Launceston were the sites of three National Reconciliation Week breakfasts all featuring Torres Strait Islander activist, author and signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Thomas Mayor and Tasmania's Young Australian of the Year, palawa woman from the northwest, Kaytlyn Johnson. These three events from Reconciliation Tasmania were attended by over 1000 people.

Reconciliation Victoria supported 23 activities from community organisations, schools and local governments across

the state. Their team also worked with Reconciliation Australia at *The Long Walk* facilitating important conversations around racism in sport. Its Virtual Breakfast Webinar saw over 200 attendees and the week concluded with the opening of the *Walk the River Scar Tree* Exhibition Guditjmarra Elder Uncle Jim Berg at Blak Dot Gallery.

More than 700 Reconciliation Action Plan partners also contributed events and actions during National Reconciliation Week and countless Australians took action on social media, online and in person.

After the extraordinary response we received throughout the week, we are encouraging all Australians to continue to be brave and make change every day of the year.



*"We must own not only the opportunity but also the risk if we fail to achieve the desired outcomes." Professor Peter Yu delivers the keynote at the 2022 RAP Conference. Photo: Joseph Mayers*

# HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY FOR RECONCILIATION IS HERE

**As the national conversation on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament intensifies, Yawuru man, Professor Peter Yu AM explains the importance of symbols and why a referendum on constitutional recognition is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.**

The outcome of this year's federal election gives some cause for optimism that the dark clouds of continuous disappointment in Australia's reconciliation journey may be lifting. We are now at a time where change feels inevitable.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in the welcome and positive comments from Prime Minister Anthony Albanese regarding the Uluru Statement from the Heart and constitutional recognition for First Nations Australians.

The new federal government has not only committed to implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full; it has made this commitment a major theme of its forthcoming term.

In the next few weeks and months there will be considerable discussion about the pathway to constitutional recognition. The constitutionally enshrined Voice will be critically important on several levels.

One can never overestimate the power of symbols.

The recognition of First Nations Australians in the Constitution will be an uplifting of our spirits and sense of who we are as inheritors of thousands of generations of people who own the lands and waters that make up modern Australia.

The Voice will provide a level of parliamentary accountability to First Nations Australians. Rather than being a third chamber of parliament, it will be a mechanism to promote collaboration and partnership.

Most importantly the Voice can provide an institutional framework to formalise a settlement or treaty between First Nations Australians and the Australian nation state underpinned by a truth-telling process.

We are now in an environment where there is an opportunity to think and work creatively with purpose. There should be a collective will and renewed determination for both public and political change.

*One can never overestimate  
the power of symbols.*

But at this critical point in history, First Nations Australians must carefully and strategically plan for the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

We cannot allow this process to belong only to the Albanese Government.

While we embrace the election of the Albanese Government for providing the opportunity to embark on the final journey of reconciliation, we must see it as an opportunity – not a pathway.

First Nations Australians must take control. It is our Statement.

We developed and endorsed it at Uluru five years ago. We advocated it to the Australian people who have responded with huge support and gave Mr Albanese a mandate for its implementation.

The Statement must be owned comprehensively by First Nations Australians in all our cultural and social diversity.

We must own the opportunity but also the risk if we fail to achieve the desired outcomes.

The three tenets of the Uluru Statement from the Heart are drawn from fundamental principles of self-determination that First Nations Australians have articulated over countless decades.

But this is not merely another government policy direction.

We are talking about settling our historic grievance of dispossession and colonisation. We are talking about a treaty. We are talking about our nation reconciled.

We can't allow government with its embedded practice of incremental management to control the process.

We cannot allow the statement's first tenet – constitutional recognition – to be achieved without a clear pathway for settlement and truth telling.

In the absence of comprehensive First Nations support for the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the referendum on constitutional recognition will fail.

And if that happens the historic opportunity for reconciliation will be lost and may never happen again.

An informed and unified First Nations community will be able to rebut the arguments that will inevitably grow as the nation moves forward on Uluru.

We know what the case against us will be.

The central argument will be that of former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's claim in rejecting the Uluru Statement five years ago; that it would contradict a principal of liberal democracy if one defined group should have a constitutional role in the workings of parliament.

Australians united in the spirit of the Uluru Statement from the Heart must strategically plan for its implementation.

We cannot allow this process to belong only to governments. Governments must facilitate the process and ensure that all voices are heard in the dialogue. But settlement and the creation of just societies are the task of the citizens.

First Nations people have set the bar with the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

We invited all Australians to support our aspirations and at the recent election, those people who were elected to govern were given a mandate to deliver on our dream for the future of this country.

The Statement must be owned comprehensively by Australians, in all our cultural and social diversity, and living in every part of the Australian nation-state.

To suggest that the Australian Constitution was founded on democratic principles is a perversion of history. The Constitution that federated the Australian nation was anything but democratic.

It expressly excluded us. We were not to be counted in the census.

It was founded on racism.

It empowered the national parliament to keep non-Europeans from living in Australia. It was a founding document for the governing of white settler Australia.

It explicitly stopped the national parliament from making laws for First Nations Australians. The Australian constitution did not allow the Commonwealth Government to undermine the laws and practices of colonial state governments that were premised on our disappearance as a people.

The proposed First Nations Voice in the constitution is a fundamental part of Australia's reckoning with that history.

And Australia will be a more inclusive and democratic country because of it.

*This is an extract from Professor Peter Yu's keynote address given at the National RAP Conference in June 2022.*

# COMMUNITY CONTROL IN ACTION: THE ORGANISATIONS LEADING INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

After two years of last-minute disruptions, postponements and pivots, the winners and highly commended organisations of the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards were finally announced at a Gala Dinner on Wednesday 8 June.

Normally held every two years, this was the first time the Awards had taken place in four years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Judged on innovation, effectiveness, self-determination, sustainability, and cultural legitimacy, the winners epitomise Indigenous-led excellence. In particular, finalists were commended by the judges for demonstrating profound resilience in the face of lockdowns and restrictions, adapting to protect their communities, as well as continue their work in the toughest of circumstances.

The following organisations – Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council Human Research Ethics Committee; the Kolling wada-ngal Committee; South Australian West Coast ACCHO Network; Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council; and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation – were all either winners or highly commended in their categories, and their stories encapsulate self-determination and community control in action.

## BEST IN THE WEST: KOLING WADA-NGAL ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

The Kolling wada-ngal Aboriginal Committee (Highly Commended, Category 1 – Outstanding examples of Governance in Indigenous led non-incorporated initiatives) was established in 2013 in response to a lack of cultural support services in the City of Wyndham in the south-west Melbourne.

Wyndham is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia and home to the highest proportion of Aboriginal people in Greater Melbourne

The committee – now the Kolling wada-ngal Aboriginal Corporation – identified that community needed space to gather, connect, share, create, grow, learn and be safe.

Wyndham City began planning and building the Wungurrwil Dhurrung Centre in 2014 with consistent input from community and the committee. The centre officially opened in 2019.

However, pandemic restrictions meant that community participation has only begun in the last year.

The committee and the community's perseverance and planning mean the space is now buzzing with a

range of community events and providing pathways to education, training and employment.

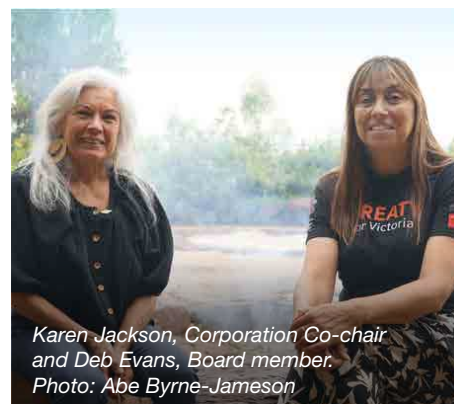
The Kolling wada-ngal vision, an *Aboriginal Home in Aboriginal Hands*, is what shapes the corporation's strategic plan embedded in its six cultural pillars. The pillars – Country, Culture, Community, Individual, Organisation and Wider Community – provide cultural standards for non-Aboriginal people to help them work with the corporation.

With community interest building, growth is now a key area of focus for the organisation in the coming years.

Succession planning is also a critical element of the Kolling wada-ngal vision, and the corporation intends to build the next generation of leaders by inviting Wyndham youth to the Committee table.

'We want to know what is happening for the youth of Wyndham. So, we created a sub-board that would attend every second board meeting and sit in and learn how to be a board member,' said manager, Rebecca Monohan.

The Kolling wada-ngal space continues to develop, and the future is looking bright.



Karen Jackson, Corporation Co-chair and Deb Evans, Board member.  
Photo: Abe Byrne-Jameson

They aim to increase staffing to assist with community programs, including health clinic pop-ups run in partnership with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Koori Kids playgroup sessions, working with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), and hosting Treaty Talks with the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria.

'We've been able to build a place that is ours, and it has come from us,' Rebecca Monaghan said.

'That governance structure has been set up by us. So, naturally it is working in the right cultural ways for our community.'

## 2022 INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE AWARDS



AH&MRC HREC Community Representatives, Uncle Danny Kelly and Auntie Rochelle Patten, sitting in front of the ethics committee's 25th anniversary artwork by Auntie Rochelle. Photo: Abe Byrne-Jameson

## HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH ETHICAL RESEARCH: AH&MRC HREC

The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council Human Research Ethics Committee, or AH&MRC HREC, (Winner, Category 1 – Outstanding examples of Governance in Indigenous led non-incorporated initiatives) was established in 1996 to ensure all Aboriginal health research in NSW was conducted in an ethical and culturally safe way, with the aim of improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the state.

CEO of AH&MRC Robert Skeen explains, 'Historically, research has not always been a positive experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Too many times it has had a negative, traumatic, and racialised impact upon these communities.'

Distressed Aboriginal participants of research were presenting to Aboriginal Medical Services across NSW with concerns over what they viewed as invasive, inappropriate and unnecessary health research in their communities.

There was a need to address these issues, and this need formed the foundations of the Committee's dual governance structure, combining western methods with traditional community governance.

Over the last 26 years, the Committee has continued to grow and now, almost all Aboriginal-focussed research in the state come to the AH&MRC HREC for approval.

The committee's 18 voluntary members – a diverse mix of Aboriginal health professionals, community members and doctors – assess research proposals from around the state to evaluate both the potential benefits and harm to community.

The 2022 IGA judging panel praised the HREC on its strong community governance structure, noting that they never gave up, with 'strength of community and Eldership and leadership ... [keeping] everything together.'

Co-Chair Dr. Michael Doyle credits their IGA success to the tireless work of the Elders: 'The award really belongs to the Elders who established the committee at a time when the research was being done to or for us rather than with us - they continue to play a significant role.'

The Committee's work goes beyond assessing research, however. It also provides cultural training opportunities for researchers, medical professionals and other HREC's in NSW.

Co-Chair of the HREC Dr. Summer May Finlay said the HREC has a dual responsibility to both monitor and educate, which has evolved over time based on the needs of community.

'The reason that we spend so much time on education is because we know that it is important to our mob that by the time the research commences, or is even designed, it is a culturally safe research project.'

The Committee is also working to establish an online library of all papers they have reviewed, giving Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), First Nations researchers and students access to ethical research that may have otherwise been inaccessible.

Community-focussed governance in ACCHOs around NSW is another area they plan to focus on through cultural governance training sessions.

Research Ethics Coordinator Kelly Jones says that strong community governance at every level leads to better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## 2022 INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE AWARDS



*Some members of Brewarrina Women's Business group; L-R Tracy Gordon, Charlotte Boney, Narelle Renalds, Belinda Boney, Courtney Boney, Denise Renalds, Urayne Warraweena and Natalie Boney. Photo: John Reidy*

# GOING FORWARD: BREWARRINA LOCAL ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have consistently fought for 'land back': the return of lands and waterways stolen during the invasion of this continent. This has been an unbreakable demand reiterated across generations.

In response to these demands in 1984 the NSW Government passed land rights legislation. The Aboriginal Land Rights Act NSW saw the establishment of a statutory body, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council and a network of 120 local Aboriginal land councils (LALCs) across the state.

One of these was in the western NSW town of Brewarrina. A year after the NSW legislation was passed the Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council's (BLALC) inaugural Chairperson, Ernie Gordon Snr, lodged a claim for about 8,000 acres in 1984. That claim, Land Claim 1043, is now the longest unresolved claim in the state.

This lack of progress has not daunted the BLALC (Winner, Category 2 – Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led small to medium incorporated organisations), and it has continued to make significant progress in providing a voice for its community and acquiring land for cultural, economic and social benefits.

Receiving a meagre annual funding of \$150,145 under the Act, the work of local land councils is always difficult, and seven years ago the BLALC was under the control of an appointed administrator.

Today, an Aboriginal community board once again drives the organisation's priorities and policies under a community-first approach, and it now has six full-time staff members.

## *Cultural preservation of our land and our environment is the first priority*

As Chief Executive Officer, John Reidy, explained, 'Brewarrina has twice been described as the state's most disadvantaged community, but that all started to change in 2016 with really strong Indigenous leadership.'

He told Reconciliation News that land acquisition continues to be central to operations and the unresolved 1984 land claim is being pursued with new vigour.

'Once that is complete, we will be one of the largest landowners in the region.'

Earlier this year BLALC acquired ownership, with the Brewarrina Shire Council, of the former Yetta Dhinnakkal minimum-security prison at Gongolgon.

In one of the largest acquisitions of land in NSW land rights history, 7,288 hectares of land associated with the former prison was bought for one dollar from the government, and is now owned under freehold title by the BLALC with ownership of the prison complex itself granted to Brewarrina Shire Council.

The buildings have since been leased by council to the Orana Haven, an Aboriginal community-controlled drug and alcohol rehabilitation service for women.

BLALC director, David Kirby, said the acquisition represents another step towards self-determination for First Nations people.

'Acquiring Yetta was an historic event not just for the Brewarrina community, but for the whole region,' Mr Kirby said. 'Cultural preservation of our land and our environment is the first priority of our local Aboriginal land council and that sets the platform for very strong governance.'

According to David Kirby the benefits of the hand back will be seen in both the spiritual, cultural and economic wellbeing of the community.

'As Indigenous people we understand the importance of what the connection to land brings us from a spiritual and emotional wellbeing perspective,' said David Kirby.

However, he argues that the land council also has a clear responsibility to ensure that employment and economic opportunities arise from land ownership.

He said there is a narrative that Aboriginal people will not use their land for productive purposes but that the BLALC wants to create as many jobs as possible from the newly returned land. With the recent opening of a local abattoir, goat grazing is currently high on the list of considerations.

'We need to be able to demonstrate to mainstream Australia that yes, we know how to use the land and we want the same economic opportunities that you have. The way in which we do that is through ideas that benefit the whole community.'

And one of these benefits is an improvement in the town's long troubled history of relations between the Aboriginal and white communities.

David reports that even the acquisition process itself has improved relationships. 'It really led us to a place that we hadn't seen before in terms of Black and white relations; all of a sudden for the first time in Brewarrina's 150-year history you had a group of Aboriginal people and a group of white people sitting in a room discussing the future of a parcel of land.'

He also sees opportunities to demonstrate to other graziers that it is possible to derive financial benefits from Country while simultaneously protecting the land and the environment.

'We want to graze our land but want to do it in a sustainable way and restore the soil quality back to the way it was when it was taken from us.'

But success is dependent on having an effective governance system which responds to community needs.

'Recently we formed the First Nations Indigenous Leadership Group, made up of representatives from each part of our Aboriginal community in town, the reserves, the housing estates for example, and invited them onto our board as a working group to get a better understanding of what community needs and aspirations are.'

'The Indigenous Leadership Group, under the auspices of the BLALC, has just formalised a partnership with the philanthropic Minderoo Foundation on job creation in the agricultural sector, and we hope this will speed up the development of our agricultural properties and employment opportunities.'

Among other economic opportunities being explored by the land council is the development of green energy on their considerable land holdings adjacent to Brewarrina, however given current uncertainty about tax breaks and other financial incentives around the renewable energy sector this idea is still in the research stage.

The Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council and the community it serves have their eyes firmly on economic self-determination and a move away from poverty and welfare dependency.

'We know what this fight is, and we are going to continue this fight. That's why the BLALC is so important, because us riverbank Blacks, we are going forward,' said David Kirby.



## 2022 INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE AWARDS



*Wungening's Boorloo Bidee Mia program is designed and led by Aboriginal people and informed by the rough sleeping community. Photo: Richard Wainwright/AAP Image*

## HEADS UP HIGH: THE WUNGENING WAY

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across Australia at the start of 2020, and lockdowns became the order of the day, governments scrambled to find accommodation for thousands of people experiencing homelessness. Those living on the streets were suddenly found beds in empty motels. Some letter writers to newspapers even hopefully suggested that COVID-19 may lead to the end of homelessness in this country.

But it wasn't to be, and after the lockdowns ended, so too did these unprecedented efforts to house Australia's people who are experiencing homelessness.

Nine thousand of Australia's estimated 116,000 people who are homeless are in Western Australia with about 1,000 of these sleeping rough on the streets. Forty per cent of these identify as First Nations people.

According to the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) in the year 2020-21, 51% of homeless people in Western Australia were Aboriginal compared to 28% nationally.

With a public housing waiting list of 33,000 (up from 9,156 in June 2020), West Australia's problem with homelessness appeared almost insurmountable. Into this space stepped the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation (Winner, Category 3 – Outstanding examples of governance in Indigenous-led large incorporated organisations), determined to bring an Aboriginal-led solution to providing Perth's rough sleepers with better opportunities.

Wungening was born in 1988 in response to the need for an Aboriginal-designed, culturally appropriate alcohol and substance abuse service in Perth.



## *We know how our community works and what our main community issues are.*

Over time Wungening has expanded its operations to reflect the complexity of the challenges they face, and now include domestic and family violence, incarceration, housing, and family welfare.

Just over a year ago it added homelessness to this list.

And with at least 44 deaths (32% of these identified as Aboriginal) of people experiencing homelessness on Perth streets in the first nine months of 2021, it is little wonder that Wungening has turned its sights to resolving this ongoing tragedy through solutions developed by local Aboriginal community members.

According to CEO, Noongar-Yamitji-Gija man, Daniel Morrison, delivering services for First Nations people is best done by their own mob. 'Because we know how our community works and what our main community issues are. There is a lack of trust and lack of recall with mainstream services as well, so it's about providing a culturally safe and secure response to our issues.'

The vehicle for this effort is Boorloo Bidee Mia, meaning 'Perth pathway to housing' in Whadjuk Noongar language, which has recently celebrated its first year of operation during Homelessness Week 2022.

Boorloo Bidee Mia (BBM) was set up as part of the State Government's All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030 to address the issue of homelessness in Perth and provide support to rough sleepers to transition through BBM into longer-term accommodation.

It is a collaboration between Wungening, local Aboriginal housing company, Noongar Mia Mia, the State Government, and the City of Perth, and the countless community members, staff and service providers who will contribute to ongoing improvement of services that suit the unique needs of the rough sleeping community.

Although both Wungening and Noongar Mia Mia were already supporting many of Perth's rough sleepers, the project provided an opportunity for a better service, and one which was designed and led by Aboriginal people and informed by the rough sleeping community.

Daniel Morrison explains that their work is underpinned by a majority Aboriginal staff with strong family and cultural links to the communities they serve.

'The Wungening way – the way we work – is to understand what the community wants, when they want it, how they want it and where they want it as well,' he told Reconciliation News.

'We are a community-controlled organisation that is developing community. That's our purpose and that's our vision.'

And the vision is working with demand growing. The Boorloo Bidee Mia facility is currently home to 66 residents with more than 70% of them identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. 44 of the current residents have been living at Boorloo Bidee Mia for six months or more.

In its first year, Boorloo Bidee Mia has helped six people with complex needs into longer-term social housing options. With some of BBM's clients having been homeless for many years, this is a remarkable achievement.

One resident believes that Boorloo Bidee Mia has helped save his life.

"My future is bright, my life full of hope thanks to all of you," he wrote in the below poem.

*Boorloo Bidee Mia is a special place,  
where the homeless get to stay.*

*The rooms are awesome, so are  
the staff and really got to say and  
thanks for saving my life you guys.*

*From hopeless alcoholic, out of  
control, I no longer drink today.*

*I couldn't have done it without  
your help.*

*And its BBM staff are angels and  
have support in every way.*

*They put up with some difficult  
people but they take it in their stride.*

*If I were you guys hold your heads  
up high and walk around with pride.*

*Through Wungening I've taken  
huge steps forward - solid ground  
is awesome too.*

*My future is bright, my life full of  
hope thanks to all of you.*

- Boorloo Bidee Mia resident

Daniel Morrison is clearly excited about Wungening's achievements. 'We have created a community for residents that people want to be a part of because it is safe, supported, and empowering. Everyone involved can be proud of this achievement

'The results after one year of Boorloo Bidee Mia supporting residents demonstrate clearly that services and solutions led by Aboriginal people work best for Aboriginal people,' said Daniel.



The SAWCAN team during a planning session.  
Photo: Robert Lang

## STRENGTH IN COLLECTIVE VOICE: SAWCAN

Imagine a wheelchair-bound man in your community. Imagine this man dragging himself on his belly across the dirt to visit his family, or to watch a local game of footy, or attend a family funeral.

He is forced to do this because there are no footpaths in his remote community and his wheelchair cannot traverse the uneven, dusty terrain.

This was a real scenario confronting an Aboriginal organisation in rural and remote South Australia.

### **Disability support: an uphill battle**

Despite the opportunities offered by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to improve the lives of people with disabilities, access to the scheme for First Nations people is falling far short of their needs.

According to a [recent Guardian article](#), more than 80 per cent of NDIS participants interviewed in the remote NT community of Ngukurr didn't know who their NDIS support coordinator was and less than 12.5 per cent knew what the NDIS is.

The exclusion of First Nations people from Government funded services is not a recent phenomenon. More than 50 years ago the Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service – Australia's first Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) – was born in Sydney, driven by the exclusion of First Nations people from mainstream health services.

While Redfern was the first, there are now more than 140 ACCHOs spread across Australia, in direct response to the entrenched, systemic racism and exclusion practiced across the health industry.

## *A program led by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people.*

### **A regional approach**

South Australian Aboriginal communities shared these frustrations of lack of access and fought to establish their own ACCHOs. Today there are five Aboriginal controlled health services on the state's west coast, providing professional primary healthcare to First Nations people in the region.

As these five organisations grew and developed their understanding of the complex challenges they faced, particularly in relation to disability services for Aboriginal people, it became clear that a regional approach was needed to address gaps and improve economies of scale. In 2018, the South Australian West Coast ACCHO Network (SAWCAN) was born (Highly Commended, Category 1 – Outstanding examples of Governance in Indigenous led non-incorporated initiatives).

Its inaugural meeting centred on the lack of local culturally appropriate disability services and the failure of the NDIS roll-out across the Eyre and West Coast.

Shortly after, SAWCAN was successful in winning an Indigenous Business Support Funding grant which financed the establishment of the Aboriginal disAbility Alliance (AAA).

Describing SAWCAN as an act of self-determination, secretariat member and AAA coordinator, Polly Paerata explains, 'Our strength is in our collective voice. We work together as a region to ensure that health and social programs coming in are not only based on what our communities need, but they are appropriately funded and centred around Aboriginal ways of being, doing and knowing.'

It is this ability to centre 'Aboriginal ways of doing' in their work that has made SAWCAN's Aboriginal disAbility Alliance such a success. SAWCAN has allowed for an approach where the five ACCHOs work collaboratively to build the capacity in the region; improving health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people. It is a program led by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people.

This new voice in the South Australia disability sector has been critical in improving services to regional and remote Aboriginal communities. With an estimated 45 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disability or long-term health conditions, this is long overdue.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 2.1 times more likely to be living with disability than other Australians, their access to NDIS services has not reflected this need.

### **Gaining traction**

Relating the story of the man crawling to community events, Polly Paerata explains that the AAA has started to have real impact.

'His story is significant in illustrating what our teams can achieve' she told Reconciliation News. 'For about 18 months we worked on getting him an appropriate bush-wheelchair.

'When you are dealing with NDIS staff who live in the city, and don't understand why anyone would need a \$30,000 wheelchair to get around in the dirt; it was quite challenging. Our workers who were trying to get the chair felt like it was too expensive, and felt as if the NDIA were doing everything they could to not pay for it.

'We were trying to give this man the basic right to participate and be involved in his community; a right expected by other Australians and yet the NDIS put up so many roadblocks,' she said. 'That's the beauty of having local Aboriginal people in these jobs because they understand what people need to successfully participate in community.'

Finally, the NDIS agreed to provide a suitable wheelchair but after so much delay the man passed away not long after it was delivered.

Polly Paerata was there when the bush chair arrived. 'He was so happy! He knew how long it took to get this chair and he said it was like he'd won Lotto; he was so grateful.'

However, she reports that there are many more battles to win before her people get the disability services they need.

'Just because we got one person a bush wheelchair doesn't mean it's any easier getting the next person one,' she concludes.

But at least Aboriginal people in remote South Australia now have their own community-controlled organisation to fight for them.





Tammy Anderson, principal at Briar Road Public School. Photo: Supplied

## IN CONVERSATION: TAMMY ANDERSON

**Tammy Anderson has been an educator and passionate advocate for Aboriginal education in schools for 20 years. A Biripi woman from Airds in NSW, Tammy is the principal at Briar Road Public School, a 2021 Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Education Awards finalist. We sat down with Tammy to talk about her career and building connections with community to achieve reconciliation in education.**

*Can you tell our readers a bit about yourself and your career so far as an educator?*

I'm a Biripi woman and principal at a very special primary school called Briar Road. I grew up here on Dharawal Country and went to Briar Road as a girl, so the school has always been important to me. I started my career here 20 years ago and have taken up roles across the school, from classroom teacher through to Aboriginal Education resource teacher.

One of the key principles I've led with is that what works for Aboriginal students works for all students. With 44% of the student body identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, we've shaped the school by asking ourselves 'How can we bring Aboriginal Education and First Nations learnings into the classroom to enhance the learning experience for everybody?'

*You grew up in the area and went to the school yourself, why was it important for you to come back as an Aboriginal Educator?*

I wanted my community to see that they can go on and be whoever it is that they want to be. Aboriginal students can make it, whether in the corporate world or the education space.

It's also about giving back to my community and that's something I've always wanted to do. It's a privilege to come back; to lead and watch young people become stronger and smarter every day. I don't ever feel like it's work – I feel like I've come home. I take the job I've got to do very seriously: to leave the community better than what it was when I got here.

*How do you feel your own connection to the community supports you as principal?*

## These kids walk and talk community all day

Well, my connection with community was what made my initial entry into the position of principal a success. If I didn't have community credibility, I would've needed to work a lot harder to build that trust.

Our community is reflected in the faces of the kids we see and teach every day, so preserving that relationship and trust we have with community must be front and centre.

You cannot ever oversell the importance of our community and relationships. They have and continue to be critical to the success of our school.

*Close to half of your students identify as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander. How do you go about incorporating their diverse identities and experiences in the school's vision for reconciliation?*

It comes down to the value of student voice and creating opportunities for them to be heard.

Honouring culture in learning allows kids the space to develop a strong sense of belonging – students need to have that for them to feel like their voice is valued. This can be simple daily practices like students being responsible for delivering Acknowledgments of Country or leading cultural lessons.

We have a buddy system where our culture and curriculum teacher works with students in year 5 and 6 and those kids then pass that knowledge onto their peers. It's quite empowering to be the cultural expert in the classroom.

Our children at 10 to 11-years-old also sit on the RAP committee – they work with us to build the future of the school.

*Why is it important to build strong relationships with community? What does that look like at Briar Road?*

I think you should reflect the laws and customs of the land that your school sits on and at the same time, where you can, reflect the individual culture of the students you're supporting.

These kids walk and talk community all day, so it's a very small commitment on our front to make sure that we're pulling across localised learnings and culture.

You do that by connecting with your local land councils, linking up with key Aboriginal people in the community who can really give you strong advice, and working with local Black businesses.

We've got some great partnerships with our community organisations and the students are the face of the school and

heading up conversations. Whenever I talk to them on the phone they'll ask, 'Where's Lachlan? How's he going?' He's a kid in year 6 and how powerful is it for him to be really leading reconciliation for us as a school?

*We talk a lot about how reconciliation is everyone's responsibility. What role do non-Indigenous staff have in relation to reconciliation.*

We really need the heavy lifting to happen with our non-Indigenous people – Aboriginal people have been on the path of reconciliation for a very long time.

I have 12 Aboriginal staff but 50 staff in total. If those other 38 weren't walking with us and in some cases ahead of us, we, as a people would be up against it.

That's probably been one of the best things to see through the progression of my career: non-Indigenous people standing up and saying, 'Hey, you know, this is not okay' or 'hey, we need to do better'.

I'm very fortunate to work with non-Indigenous teachers and I always say the successes of Briar Road haven't been just on the Aboriginal staff or the students. It's been because of what we've done as a team.

I've seen this change in the community too. Parents want their children to have opportunities to learn about First Nations peoples and culture. I think that's something that's changed over the last 20 years.

*Do you have any advice for schools looking to develop further along their own reconciliation journey?*

Sometimes you see people who are doing it for all the wrong reasons. Starting a Reconciliation Action Plan, for example, can be ticking off an 'inclusion box', but the people who have created real change for their kids and their school community are the ones who come at it authentically.

Reconciliation in schools is community relationships. It's trained teachers. It's having real love and respect for culture. It's wanting to see a better and brighter future for these kids.

Ask yourself, why are you doing this? What do you want to achieve? Having that true passion for reconciliation is important because it's those people – including non-Indigenous people – who are really helping us bust through the doors.

**Applications for the 2023 Narragunnawali Awards open on Monday, 30 January 2023. Apply or nominate a school, here: [narragunnawali.org.au/awards](https://narragunnawali.org.au/awards)**

*Uncle Archie Roach performing at the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards, International Convention Centre, Gadigal Country. Photo Joseph Mayers*

# UNCLE ARCHIE ROACH, REMEMBERED BY RHYAN CLAPHAM

At the end of July we lost a powerful voice of our nation, Archie Roach.

Knowledge holder, storyteller, truth-teller, and healer, for more than 30 years he sang and spoke the truth about his life and shone a light on our history, our present, and future.

At Reconciliation Australia, we hold a special memory of Uncle Archie when he took the stage at the Indigenous Governance Awards in early June 2022, keeping a long-standing commitment – despite his obvious ill health – to honour the achievements of the winners and finalists.

We will never forget his powerful, generous and compelling performance that night.

He understood the power of music and storytelling to communicate, connect and heal and – through the Archie Roach Foundation – he was committed to helping others share their story to add to a stronger, more culturally respectful national story.

Through the foundation he produced concerts for kids inside youth detention centres, he supported Jessie Lloyd's 'Mission Songs' project, and created learning resources for schools based on his landmark stolen generations' song, 'Took the Children Away'.

Since 2019 the foundation has also supported an emerging artists award at the National Indigenous Music Awards, known as the NIMAs, as part of its focus on encouraging and uplifting young mob.

The 2022 NIMAs were enriched with passionate acknowledgements of the songman and concluded with an uplifting tribute when all performers took to the stage for a version of Uncle Archie's song, 'We Won't Cry' which did indeed lift all of our spirits high, '...up to the sky'.

All performers – that is – except for the recipient of the Archie Roach Foundation Award for Emerging Artists, rapper DOBBY, aka Murrawarri and Filipino hip hop artist and composer Rhyan Clapham.

DOBBY instead delivered a heartfelt solo version of 'We Won't Cry' from his bedroom on Gadigal Country (Annandale) where he was confined by COVID-19, unable to attend the awards.

Here Rhyan Clapham shares his Archie stories and memories and what happened when he found out he had won the award.

*With every word he'd put his heart on the line.*

Just before the NIMAs, my manager, Vyv, called me up and told me that I was receiving the Archie Roach Foundation Award.

I was just silent and overwhelmed and started welling up. It was a whirlwind of emotion, trying to figure out what it means, especially so soon after his passing.

It took me a few days to really understand how to receive that award spiritually as well as physically, because there are some huge implications that I don't take for granted and it goes right into my soul.

I took it as a responsibility, at the end of the day, to honour what Uncle Archie does as a songman.

In my eyes, he does things with his music that I'll never be able to understand how to do, but in my experience and my artistry I want to strive to continue that work of truth-telling, in whatever way that means for me.

So, the only way I knew how to say thank you for the award and to say thank you to the Foundation and thank you to Uncle Archie's family was to play 'We Won't Cry'. It was something that I wanted to do because we're still feeling it and I wanted to honour him in that way.

### **Influence and inspiration**

I remember, when I was young, the first time I heard and watched the music video for 'Took The Children Away,' because it was the first song I heard of Uncle Archie's.

There's nothing I can say that people don't already know about how important that song is, not just to mob but to all Australians – to non-Indigenous people. Not just because of what he's saying, but because of how Uncle Archie said it.

One of the first times I saw him was in Wollongong with my dad and my aunties back in 2017 or 2018. Just hearing the spaces in between his actual performing, where he'd take that long breath and you could hear a pin drop.

Everyone was listening to his every word because you could tell that with every word he'd put his heart on the line. What a beautiful soul he was.

I saw him again in Naarm last year, at the launch of the Dhadjowa Foundation and it was an honour for me to perform at the launch.

Dhadjowa was founded by those who have lost loved ones to police violence: Tanya Day's family, Kumanjaji Walker's family and so on. Uncle Archie performed and that was the time I got to meet him, with Barkaa.

It was an emotional day and right before he performed 'We Won't Cry,' he talked about Lloyd Boney, a man from Brewarrina who died in police custody in 1987. His death was the tipping point for the establishment of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

It was really touching for Uncle to talk about it and then to perform that beautiful song.

For me, it put a lot of things into context. There was a lot of anger and a lot of sadness that day but he was part of the healing. His gentleness is really what struck me, and that's coming from a so-called 'angry rapper', ha!

### **Truth-teller**

As we know, truth-telling comes in many different forms.

For a hip hop artist like myself a lot of that is a very head-on, direct form of truth-telling, and I love that sort of stuff.

But it's hard to do that in the way that Uncle Archie did, because he brings it twofold: he brings in a layer of something melancholy or bittersweet; he's telling you so much, telling you a story from his perspective and his lived experience as a Blak man, and as part of the Stolen Generations.

That requires so much pain and bravery to speak about. I couldn't even imagine.

But he does it in a way that non-Indigenous people can see the beauty in the song and the pain in the story at the same time.

That's a gift. That's talent. That's a songman of multiple generations.

It's something that becomes timeless, for my generation and for younger generations to receive that way of storytelling as his legacy.

Try and imagine a world, this country, without his way of storytelling, without his story, without his music. It's hard to imagine. In thinking about it, you can't help but realise how much he's contributed.

As time goes on, I think we'll truly understand what he means to the collective consciousness of Australia's history and to mob as well.

So, it's important to keep talking about it.

*Archie Roach Foundation Award for Emerging Artists winner, DOBBY's most recent work includes the multimedia community collaboration production, WARRANGU; River Story:*

[dobby.com.au/warrangu](http://dobby.com.au/warrangu)

*Grand final winners of the 2004 Koori Knockout, the Cec Patten–Ron Merritt Memorial Redfern All Blacks, lift captain Graeme Merritt in the air after the game, Redfern Oval, Sydney, Gadigal Country. Photo: Jamie James, courtesy of the State Library of NSW*



# ‘WE WANTED SOMETHING FOR OURSELVES’: THE KOORI KNOCKOUT TURNS 50

**Nakari Thorpe shines a light on the long journey of the Koori Knockout and its enduring role bringing community together as a new exhibition looks at the history of the ‘modern day corroboree’.**

Uncle Victor Wright has never missed a Koori Knockout.

For 49 years, he has turned up to either play, coach or watch his family represent their community.

This year — the event’s 50th anniversary — it will be no different.

“It’s a milestone, I’ll be racing back to Sydney and driving down to Nowra ... I’m not gonna miss it,” he said.

Mr Wright, a Dunghutti and Anaiwan man from Kempsey, is one of the founding members of the event.

Over the past five decades, he’s seen it grow from its humble beginnings to one of the biggest Indigenous sporting events in the country.

More than 30,000 players and spectators descended on the NSW south coast on the October long weekend for the anniversary.

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, the South Coast Black Cockatoos will finally be able to host the event after winning in 2019.

There are more than 60 men’s teams alone, along with women’s and junior competitions — all vying for the coveted trophy and pride of their community.

“It’s been a long, hard journey ... [but] when you see where it is today and it’s still as strong,” Mr Wright said.

The now 74-year-old remembers sitting at the back of the Clifton Hotel in Redfern when the idea of an all-Aboriginal football carnival came up in conversation.



It was the early 1970s and he was there with Bob Smith, Bob Morgan, Bill Kennedy, Danny Rose and the late George Jackson.

They were all young Aboriginal men from country New South Wales working and playing footy in Sydney, and all associated with the Koorie United team, who would become the founding members of the Knockout.

“We just sat down and had a few little yarns ... we wanted something for ourselves, something that was grassroots,” he said.

There had been many town-based carnivals in previous years, but they wanted a state-wide event.

The first ever Knockout was played at the Camdenville Oval in St Peters in 1971.

There were about a dozen teams, mostly from Walgett, Kempsey, Moree and a few from Sydney.

“They felt there wasn’t enough representation of Aboriginal players in the big league, so they decided they’d form their own competition, and it was called the Koorie Knockout,” Gamilaroi man Ronald Briggs said.

Mr Briggs, a curator and librarian at the State Library of NSW, has worked for the past two years with the community, families and the founding members to capture the history, pride and excitement of the event in a new exhibition.

Photos, videos, and other memorabilia tell the story of its historical origins to its “modern contemporary representation” today.

“I’ve been to most Knockouts since about 1986, so it’s been a real thrill bringing it all together,” Mr Briggs said.

“When the Knockout was in my hometown of Moree, I remember it being just a huge family event, mob from all over the state converged on Moree and it was just such an exciting, thrilling event for me as a young kid.



*Koorie Knockout supporters from Moree, Dubbo, Wiradjuri Country, 2015. Photo by Barbara McGrady, Gomerioi/Gamilaraay Murri, courtesy of the State Library of NSW*

“It is all about the football of course but it is also about reunion, bringing mob together — we want to capture that and keep it for people to look at in the future and understand why it is such an important event.”

In the 1974 competition, the Kempsey team won.

From that point on, it was decided the winning team would host the following year — kick-starting a tradition that carries on today.

This year is the first time a South Coast team will host.

“It’s like a modern-day corroboree, it’s a real celebration for Indigenous people. We all get together, we catch up, and obviously share in the passion we have for rugby league,” NRL Pathways Manager and Anaiwan man Dean Widders said.

Like many, Mr Widders has a long association with the Knockout, playing with his family and community.

While grassroots, it also attracts some of the games’ biggest stars like Latrell Mitchell, Josh Addo-Carr and Cody Walker.

“I think it’s the only sport in the world where a world champion can be playing against someone who doesn’t even play,” he said.

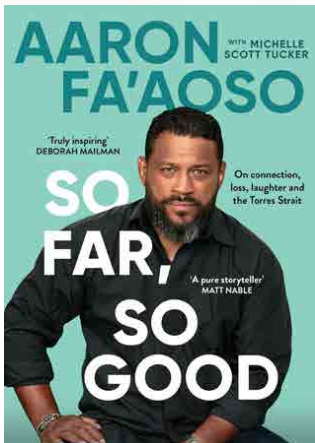
“Our mob created it, worked hard, kept turning up and found the money to pay for it, and built it up in terms of professionalism ... so it is something that we hold dear to our hearts, that’s something we’re really proud of.”

*The Koorie Knockout: 50 Years is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW on show until 27 August 2023.*

*Nakari Thorpe is a Gonnai, Gunditjmarra and Gooreng Gooreng woman from Victoria and Queensland. She is a presenter and the Indigenous Communities Reporter with ABC News in Sydney providing coverage across television, radio and digital. She previously worked as a multi-platform reporter with SBS and NITV covering federal politics in the Canberra Press Gallery and national Indigenous affairs.*

*This article was originally published on ABC News.*

# LOOK FOR A BOOK!



***So Far, So Good – On connection, loss, laughter and the Torres Strait***  
Aaron Fa'aoso with Michelle Scott Tucker (Pantera Press)

Aaron Fa'aoso starts his new memoir with a story of a school yard fight to recover his cousin's stolen bike. The fight's repercussions were severe for fifteen-year old Aaron but he consoles himself with the thought that his protagonist 'wasn't going to steal from a Blackfella again'.

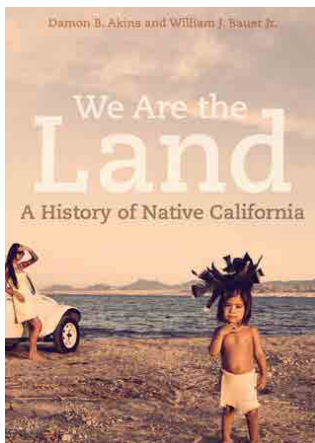
It is a fitting anecdote to start this story of a man's beginnings, impacted by poverty and racism, but buoyed by the love of family and the strength of his Torres Strait culture.

Over its 343 pages, *So Far, So Good* tells a remarkable story from beginnings in the tiny Cape York community of Seisia, to becoming a major Australian actor, comedian, producer, and entrepreneur. Aaron's professional

detours along the way include Kings Cross bouncer, professional footballer and remote health worker.

With great humour, Aaron takes the reader through the travails of an extraordinary life. A series of chapters titled in his Grandmother's Kala Lagaw Ya language and English offer observations on contemporary Australia.

In the final pages, Aaron provides some advice to white Australia: 'We all have to move forward together... but before that can happen Whitefellas need to tell the truth, or learn the truth and accept the wrongs of the past and present, and the impact of those wrongs on my people. On me.'



***We Are the Land: A History of Native California***  
Damon B. Akins and William J. Bauer (University of California Press)

In this thoughtful and comprehensive study of what we now know as 'California', the US State is presented as a place that has always been and remains Indigenous land, with Indigenous People central to the history and future of the place.

The authors are both historians: Bauer an enrolled citizen of the Round Valley Indian Tribes and Professor of History at the University of Nevada; and Akins, a Professor of History at Guilford College.

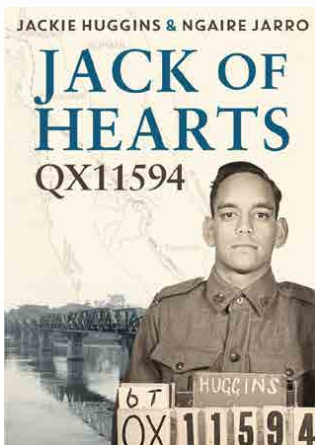
They centre California's history around the lives and legacies of its Indigenous Peoples, telling the nuanced story of many nations and tribes, separated by language into as many as 135 distinct dialects.

The book traces their lives during Spanish colonisation, which saw the establishment of coercive religious labour camps or 'missions', the introduction of epidemic diseases and the forced removal of children from their parents.

Bauer and Akins describe the devastating impacts of the Mexican secularization that followed, the goldrush, statehood and ongoing genocide. Against this backdrop, they detail the activism and political organisation for sovereignty that has seen California's First Peoples build the casino economy of today, the revenues of which have enabled 'California Indians' to claim rightful ownership of lands that they have helped restore, in turn reviving language and cultural practices.

The parallels between the Californian and Australian contexts are striking, from the historical and ongoing atrocities of colonisation to the collective action taken towards self-determination and reconciliation.

*We Are the Land* is a great resource for educational and policy-making settings, as well as for casual readers interested in histories that centre the experiences of First Nations peoples around the world.



**Jack of Hearts: QX11594**  
**Jackie Huggins &**  
**Ngaire Jarro**  
 (Magabala Books)

Jack Huggins was a young Aboriginal man from Ayr, Qld who fought for Australia in World War II. His father had served in World War I and Jack was determined to follow in his father's footsteps

He was captured by the Japanese in Singapore and spent years on the notorious Burma-Thailand railway.

When he returned to Australia - like so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service members - he faced discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion.

Jackie Huggins and Ngaire Jarro's *Jack of Hearts: QX11594* is a deeply moving biography of their father's experiences. It tells a story of loss, love, courage, and the immeasurable contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service members have made to our history.

Above all else, *Jack of Hearts* reminds us that the fight for recognition of their bravery continues.

**Our Dreaming**  
**Kirli Saunders and Dub Leffler (Scholastic Australia)**

Proud Gunaï author Kirli Saunders and descendent from the Bigambul people of south-west Queensland, illustrator Dub Leffler, once again join forces to bring to life *Our Dreaming*, a stunning visual journey for young readers, who are invited to 'walk with me' while the knowledge of 'Our Dreaming as the Elders told it' is shared.

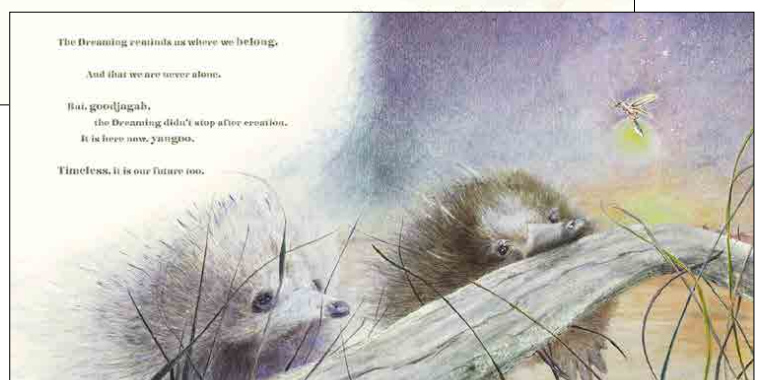
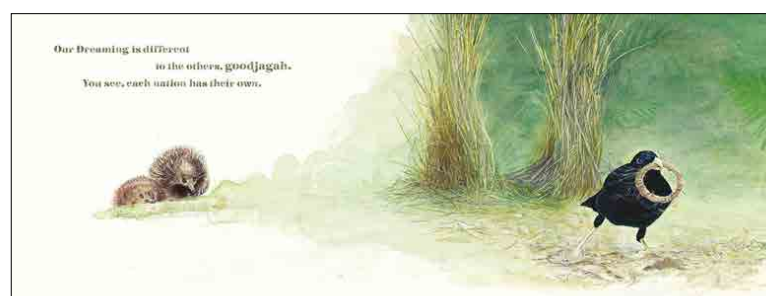
An older echidna walks through Country with a young echidna, taking the goodjagah on a path of 'footstone laid down by those who came before'. It is a journey on Gundungurra Dreaming and connectedness to Country: 'Our Dreaming is different to the others, goodjagah. You see, each nation has their own.'

Kirli effortlessly interlaces Gundungurra words into the story and there is a Gundungurra word list at the back of the book, explaining the meaning and how to pronounce each of the words.

The illustrations are soft and beautiful – making use of colours that reflect the Country, animals and insects who the two echidnas encounter on their path.

It's a perfect and gentle bedtime story and takes the young ones on a journey, as three-year-old Ethan said when seeing the bees, 'we have to look after the bees to look after the earth.'

*Our Dreaming* explores a deep love and respect for Country and all her spirits.





# NARRAGUNNAWALI AWARDS 2023



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celebrate outstanding commitment  
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