

ReconciliationNews

ISSUE NO 25 // December 2012



Reconciliation
AUSTRALIA



Michael McLeod and
Dugald Russell
**the Message
Stick men**

Jennifer Westacott talks
**Indigenous
business in
Corporate
Australia**

Mick Dodson on
**Self-determination
in action**

CONTENTS

- 3** **Creating new media jobs for
Indigenous Australians**
-
- 4** **Corporate Australia leads
the way**
-
- 8** **Elders bring new hope to
the Kimberley**
-
- 10** **Indigenous governance:
self-determination in action**
-
- 13** **Appeal for
Aboriginal engineers**
-
- 14** **The corporate warriors**
-
- 18** **Australian business
and reconciliation**
-

Old Parliament House,
King George Terrace, Parkes ACT 2600
PO Box 4773, Kingston ACT 2604
Ph: (02) 6273 9200
Fax: (02) 6273 9201
www.reconciliation.org.au

As the national organisation building relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians, Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the elders both past and present.

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit, non-government organisation. Your active contribution and financial support helps us develop innovative programs and resources.

This newsletter is compiled by Reconciliation Australia to share reconciliation stories, issues and opinions. Feedback and story ideas are always welcome along with names and addresses of people who would like to receive the newsletter. Please email us at: enquiries@reconciliation.org.au

Caution: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this publication may contain the images of deceased people.



**Reconciliation
AUSTRALIA**

CEO message

The last few months have been exhilarating for the team here at Reconciliation Australia. We've celebrated many wins—particularly in the corporate space—and as such we've decided to dedicate this issue to reconciliation in business.

I'm pleased to report that our Workplace Ready program is now up and running and we've received fantastic feedback from participants. The program is designed to give organisations the tools, strategies and information to achieve their public commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. In the second half of this year we've conducted six workshops in Sydney and Melbourne with organisations including Woolworths, Myer and Toll Transport. We also held CEO luncheons with the Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development, The Hon. Julie Collins MP and her Department Secretary Ms Lisa Paul where CEOs and senior executives discussed the driving factors for organisations committing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets and how diversity enhances a workforce.

Our focus on workplaces and the partnerships Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) organisations are building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses is reaping benefits for all. Kalico Catering, an AIMSC-certified small business, has seen huge growth in opportunities through supplier diversity commitments made by RAP partners. Having recently been contracted for the Workplace Ready workshops, Kalico demonstrates that any genuine partnership, big or small, has great benefits for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and RAP organisations alike.

And the Business Council of Australia has some great results to report in their annual Indigenous Engagement Survey. In this issue Chief Executive Jennifer Westacott reflects on the findings and the benefits of building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Also in this issue, Professor Mick Dodson writes about the success of the Indigenous Governance Awards program and the outstanding organisations and people he met throughout the judging process.

In October, Sydney hosted the World Indigenous Business Forum at which our Co-Chair Dr Tom Calma and Communications General Manager Karen Mundine both presented. It was inspiring to hear about the wonderful work Indigenous organisations from around the globe are doing, particularly in terms of partnerships, business enterprise and creating economic wealth.

Finally, I would like to extend my warm and heartfelt congratulations to Reconciliation Australia Board Director Kirstie Parker and You Me Unity Deputy Campaign Director Tanya Hosch who joined me in being recognised in the inaugural '100 Women of Influence Awards' (see pg 19).

As we swiftly approach the festive season, I would like to thank you for your support in 2012 and look forward to sharing more stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success with you in 2013.

Leah Armstrong,
CEO Reconciliation Australia





Creating new media jobs for Indigenous Australians

(Left - right) Jessica Mauboy, Minister for the Arts Simon Crean, Deborah Mailman, Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development Julie Collins and Sapphires Director Wayne Blair launched the Indigenous Employment Strategy at Parliament House. Image by ID Photographics and courtesy Screen Australia.

With the help of the stars from the hit film *The Sapphires*, some of Australia's leading media outlets joined forces to launch a new work and training program to create jobs for Indigenous Australians.

Earlier this year the Media Reconciliation Industry Network Group (Media RING) launched its Indigenous Employment Strategy at Parliament House. The \$1.1 million work and training program, supported by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), will create 40 new jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in sectors such as newspapers, new media, film and television.

In early 2008, media organisations teamed up with Indigenous organisations, government media agencies, media buyers and trade associations to form the Media RING. Lead by Foxtel, the aim of the RING was to drive practical measures that support and promote reconciliation in the media sector; increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (both in front and behind the camera) and show more positive stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across mediums such as TV, film, radio and print.

With many Australians believing the media has a strong influence over attitudes to Indigenous people; Foxtel saw the need to involve more

media organisations with the philosophy of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program of creating respect, relationships and opportunities. Starting out with 17 participating companies, the Media RING has now grown to include over 40 members with ABC, Sky News, NITV, Metro Screen, News Limited, SBS and Screen Australia all taking an active role in the group.

Each member is committed to developing and enhancing career opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and ensuring that more Indigenous Australian stories are told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2010 a review of the Australian Government's investment in the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Sector concluded that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presenters, producers and journalists give non-Indigenous Australians an alternative perspective on issues that support reconciliation, by providing a cultural bridge between communities. Acting on some of the recommendations in the review, the Media

RING set out to create more sustainable job and training opportunities for Australian Indigenous talent—from journalists and script writers to filmmakers and editors—it was clear there needed to be a long-term strategy in place to encourage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees working in the media and communications sector.

Susanne Larson, Chair of the Media RING and SBS Manager of Policy and Stakeholder Relations, said the strength of the strategy is signified by the diverse opportunities on offer.

"The strategy includes tailored training for each individual, and will look at the long-term growth of the sector beginning in schools and including workplace culture and mentoring.

"More diverse media workplaces will reflect and represent the diversity of the Australian community and, in particular, Indigenous stories and opinions."

To find out more about the Media RING and the 2012–2014 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy visit www.mediaring.org.au.

Corporate Australia leads the way

by Jennifer Westacott,
Chief Executive, Business Council of Australia



Reconciliation
AUSTRALIA

Most, if not all, member companies of the Business Council of Australia operate on the basis of an articulated set of values and principles. These values and principles flow through the whole structure, from boards and management, to staff and the way companies engage with people in the broader community.

Values and principles are increasingly seen as critical to success because they demonstrate to staff and customers where a company is going and why.

In that context, it should come as no surprise that the most significant factors identified by our members companies as driving their support of Indigenous employment and economic development are their sense of what's right in terms of delivering shared value, along with the expectations of staff, customers and shareholders.

Corporate Australia recognises its responsibility to help ensure that economic growth should not leave groups of Australians behind. Every citizen should reap the benefits of growth to deliver on the principle of shared value.

To this end, our members are playing a leading role in developing progressive and effective ways to provide Indigenous people with economic opportunities. The capacity of these successful CEOs to think long term and come up with creative approaches means they are often better equipped than government to work through these complex challenges.

“Every citizen should reap the benefits of growth to deliver on the principle of shared value.”

The evidence for this comes through in our annual survey of member companies in which we ask them to describe what they are doing to support Indigenous employment and economic development.

The four main aims of our Indigenous engagement survey are to:

- raise awareness about what businesses can do to help improve opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous Australians
- share information about what's working, what hasn't worked so well and the insights of our members on why
- encourage more businesses to get involved, and
- promote collaboration between business, government and community organisations, like Reconciliation Australia.

This year's survey was launched by our President, Tony Shepherd, in November in Canberra.

Once again, the 2012 survey shows members reaching out in even larger numbers and achieving meaningful outcomes.

We had a record response rate, with 95 member companies (81 per cent of our total membership) filling out the survey. Across the Australian economy, from mining, construction and financial services through to retail and tourism, companies are actively involved in activities that make sense in the context of their overall business strategies.

An impressive 76 per cent of survey respondents reported having formal Indigenous engagement strategies in place. Over the past 12 months, these companies employed 2000 additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and took on 700 extra Indigenous trainees.

As MMG Limited said in the company's survey response: “The focus on a pathway from unemployment to a rewarding business or career is the simplest and most direct contribution business can make to redressing areas of Indigenous disadvantage.”

(Left - right) Kathleen Sorensen from Martumili Artists, BHP Billiton CEO Marius Kloppers and Reconciliation Australia CEO Leah Armstrong recently launched BHP Billiton's fourth Reconciliation Action Plan. Image, Wayne Quilliam.



Business Council of Australia Chief Executive Jennifer Westacott (fifth from left) with the Board of West Desert Dialysis and fellow IGA judges Prof Mick Dodson and Simon Longstaff in front of the 'Purple Truck' mobile dialysis, Alice Springs. Image, Justin Brierty and courtesy Centralian Advocate.

Another, from Fortescue Metals Group Limited summed up their strategy this way: "Jobs and real business opportunities are the key, we develop all our programs around this."

As well as providing employment opportunities, member companies told us they are giving more than 48,500 hours of unpaid work in Indigenous engagement activities—43 companies are also supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business and 26 provide pro bono support to help develop Indigenous business capability.

Forty companies are now encouraging their business partners to develop Indigenous initiatives.

In many cases, the commitment of these large companies comes from the highest levels, with one explaining that: "Senior management engagement in all levels and on a permanent basis, is critical for success."

While the scale of Indigenous employment varies among companies, depending on the type of business, the vast majority say that providing jobs, training and other engagement activity also delivers clear commercial benefits to the business.

"Senior management engagement in all levels and on a permanent basis, is critical for success."

This recognition of the 'business case' that sits alongside the moral and social significance of this area of work, is particularly important in encouraging

even greater numbers of companies to be involved. The Business Council makes a point of asking member companies who do not currently have Indigenous engagement activities to also complete the annual survey.

Their input is invaluable in highlighting continued barriers and obstacles.

Last year's results showed that 53 per cent of these companies were discouraged because they couldn't identify the business case for being involved. This year, that number had dropped to just 6 per cent.

As well as seeing employment and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses as a priority, many companies cite the value of cultural awareness, with companies describing the broad, often unintended benefits when staff have greater awareness of, and respect for, diversity.

The survey responses highlight these two-way benefits of Indigenous engagement as companies report an improved corporate culture and better staff morale.

Several also say that the work has helped build better relationships with government and more of a partnership approach to tackling Indigenous disadvantage.

While there are many positive findings from this year's survey, it also makes it clear that there is still plenty of work left to do.

Of the 23 per cent of companies that do not have Indigenous activities, the great majority (69 per cent) cited lack of resources as the main barrier, while 25 per cent cited a lack of expertise.

But almost two thirds of companies that do not have strategies in place expressed an interest in learning more about how to get started from other member companies. One of the ways we facilitate this kind of interaction is through our Business Indigenous Network, which brings together people who manage Indigenous engagement activities within member companies.

In the last 12 months, the network has grown from 32 to 50 member company representatives.

Reconciliation Australia also has an important role to play in supporting companies to approach Indigenous engagement in an appropriate way that is most likely to generate win-win outcomes for Indigenous Australians and the community at large.

Many companies with Indigenous engagement strategies have turned to Reconciliation Australia for information and guidance on implementing an Indigenous engagement strategy. Several commented specifically on the benefits of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) framework to develop an effective Indigenous engagement strategy.

As a member of the judging panel for this year's Indigenous Governance Awards (IGA), I learned a lot personally and found it fascinating to see the same values driven approach achieving success in Indigenous organisations.

There is so much to celebrate in Indigenous governance and service

delivery. I was thrilled that one of the two finalist organisations I visited, NPY Women's Council, took out the top prize at the Awards Ceremony. The other, Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation (WDNWPT), also received high praise from all of the judges.

Spending time with these two organisations recently in Alice Springs, what struck me most was the consistency of the messages we heard from all levels of the organisation and board directors. It said a great deal about the strength of establishing and being guided by shared values.

“It may come as a surprise to some people, but I don't know one CEO who isn't passionate about a set of values that go to our overarching goal of achieving enduring prosperity for all Australians.”

Both organisations are primarily involved in service delivery but also play a strong advocacy role for the people they represent. Both are examples of organisations whose values come first and who have developed innovative governance and service delivery models to reflect those values.

For example, WDNWPT's beautifully succinct strategic plan states: “We will ensure that Walytja (family), Tjukurrpa (dreaming) Ngurra (country) and Kuunyi (compassion) are central to all that we do and say.”

These principles and values fundamentally guide their decisions on a daily basis and reinforced that it was exactly what

WDNWPT does. Their model is designed to ensure patients suffering end-stage renal failure can return to their home communities, be with family, share their important knowledge and contribute to community life. When considering petitions from remote communities for remote dialysis services, the board considers ‘Kuunyi’ and has put other communities in more need ahead of their own. A leading Australian kidney specialist has described the WDNWPT model as world best-practice.

The NPY Women's Council's board room walls are covered with both English and Pitjantjatjara versions of their guiding principles and key governance terms. Terms like ‘insolvency’ have been deftly translated into Pitjantjatjara and their principles—like “ngapartji ngapartji kulinma munu iwara wananma tjukarurungku: respect each other and follow the law straight”—sit right above where the board makes all its decisions.

Both organisations offered up examples of where they had refused funding because its conditions did not match their values. Both organisations have stood firm against strong opposition, often for many years, to see important board decisions through. At the end of their successful 15 year fight against take-away alcohol sales at Curtin Springs roadhouse, the women of NPY practiced another of their principles “kalypangku: conciliatory” and sat down and ate kangaroo killed by the roadhouse owners son.

My experience of how these organisations operate on the basis of vision and values reflects a lot of what I hear from Business Council member CEOs when they talk about their vision for Australia.

It may come as a surprise to some people, but I don't know one CEO who isn't passionate about a set of values that go to our overarching goal of achieving enduring prosperity for all Australians.

Everything we do at the Council is checked back against those values, and our Indigenous engagement activities provide an important model of how economic and social objectives are not in conflict but rather deeply interconnected.

Elders bring new hope to the Kimberley

by Gary Banks, Chairman, Productivity Commission



Yiriman trip back to Country.
Image, courtesy Yiriman Project.

In August this year I travelled on planes big and small from Melbourne to the Kimberley town of Fitzroy Crossing to visit the Yiriman Project, one of the finalists in the 2012 BHP Billiton and Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Governance Awards. The Panel Chair Professor Mick Dodson and I sat under a tin verandah at the back of the brightly painted Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre offices and listened for a couple of hours to an impressive group of assembled elders. They had come together across vast distances to tell us about their project, how it works and what it means to them.

It was clear even as the elders discussed whether to screen a DVD for us that unfortunately contained images of deceased people that this was a group of people who listen respectfully to each other and reach

decisions through consensus. It was a privilege to see how this group went about their business. And it again brought home to me that through these awards, in which I have participated since 2006 (their second

year), I've had the good fortune to witness the best of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are doing, through well-run organisations, to take charge of their communities and their futures.

These organisations and initiatives serve as models not only for other Indigenous organisations, but for mainstream organisations as well. They are responsive and innovative, as well as well structured and accountable. They typically operate on small budgets, but leverage what resources they have to achieve laudable results, often in areas where others have struggled.

In October, the Yiriman team, led by some of the elders who govern the project, took the same trip I did—but in reverse—when they travelled to the Awards ceremony at the BHP Billiton headquarters in Melbourne to receive first prize in their category. Among the 120 guests were key business people, including BHP Billiton's Marius Kloppers, whose commitment to this program shined through, and leaders from community groups and government. BHP Billiton has supported the Awards since the beginning, championing the now commonly held belief in business that strong and well-governed Indigenous organisations and communities are good for everyone.

“When an organisation reflects the values of its members, those members naturally buy into it and invest in its success. Without this core attribute, organisations struggle to succeed.”

Both Yiriman and the other category winner, NPY Women's Council, are led by senior Aboriginal people who are determined to make life better for their people and in particular for their children. Both organisations share the hallmarks of good corporate governance, but with that something extra that distinguishes them from most mainstream companies and organisations—something that might best be summed up as 'cultural fit'. When an

organisation reflects the values of its members, those members naturally buy into it and invest in its success. Without this core attribute, organisations struggle to succeed. Similarly, without the wider legitimacy that organisations earn through being accountable with funds, transparent about decisions, reliable in their dealings with stakeholders and stable, funding bodies and partners stay away.

We know from the difficulties so many communities face that solutions to the issues confronting them are not easy and not just a matter of money or government will. Community leadership and the legitimacy of this leadership are absolutely essential. How leaders marshal resources, engage partners, mobilise assets and generate support to enact their vision is at the heart of effective governance.

Yiriman exemplifies how strong leadership and effective governance can combine to produce good outcomes. Frustrated and upset by the suicides, self-harm and substance abuse that have been blighting young Aboriginal lives, the group of cultural leaders from the central and south-west Kimberley region decided to address what they saw as (and what scholarly research has confirmed to be) the root cause of the malaise. The Yiriman Project helps young Aboriginal men and women from the townships 'find themselves', by taking them on expeditions back to Country in the company of elders. These are the grandchildren of people who were essentially driven off their lands when legislated equal wages deprived them of their situations on the pastoral properties.

The elders knew that without a strong sense of identity, their young people are at risk. Yiriman immerses them in the stories, songs, bush craft and knowledge that are their cultural heritage. It offers them the opportunity to strengthen their sense of belonging, so they can then venture into the world with a greater sense of self-worth and confidence.

However, Yiriman has struggled to attract sustained financial support. Government funding agencies in particular seemingly find it difficult to fit the Project's culturally-

based model into any of their boxes. Meanwhile substantial funds are directed to mainstream mental health services which arguably are not addressing the deeper needs of the young.


“The Yiriman Project helps young Aboriginal men and women from the townships 'find themselves', by taking them on expeditions back to Country in the company of elders.”

What has made both Yiriman and NPY successful is that the solutions they have devised and implemented involve their communities and families. They are grounded in an understanding both of the local problems and the likely solutions, something that is hard to achieve from Canberra or the capitals. Really the only challenge these organisations should present for public policy is how to harness and propagate them. Through these awards and an emerging focus on the crucial role of good governance in the 'things that work' for Indigenous Australians, there is cause for hope.

Gary Banks AO has been Chairman of the Productivity Commission since its inception in April 1998 and has headed national inquiries on a variety of public policy and regulatory topics. Gary also chairs the inter-governmental Review of Government Services which produces the annual Report on Government Services and the two yearly report Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage.

Indigenous governance: self-determination in action

by Professor Mick Dodson



Professor Mick Dodson discussing governance with members of the Yiriman Project Board during a site visit to the Kimberley. Image, Wayne Quilliam.

In the recent Northern Territory elections remote-living Aboriginal voters played a pivotal role in changing the government. They were making a clear statement about being shut out of decision-making processes and how they feel about governments who offer ever-diminishing opportunities for genuine Indigenous control.

What I know, and what has been reinforced for me during the last few months visiting the eight finalists of the 2012 Reconciliation Australia and BHP Billiton Indigenous Governance Awards, is that the best and most viable solution to overcoming the enormous social, economic and political issues effecting Indigenous Australia is self-determination. By that I mean Indigenous people in charge of making and implementing the important decisions about their lives and futures. The 2012 IGA winners and finalists demonstrate that strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations have proven themselves more effective than governments and mainstream organisations. It's time we take note of this success and work with communities and their organisations to strengthen and support their capacity to take charge of issues that impact them.

Visiting these remarkable organisations and initiatives in close succession only served to highlight their commonalities. Chief among them is culture, or more correctly the centrality of culture to everything they do.

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, winners in this year's IGA Category A (outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in an Indigenous incorporated organisation) clearly illustrate the point when they say: "We all hold strong Tjukurpa (dreaming) and we don't want to see our culture lost. We must keep teaching our young girls the Laws of our grandmothers because we want them to carry it into the future. We must sort out our problems and we must speak out strongly."

The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, who received the highly commended award in Category B (outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in a non-incorporated initiative or project); represent 16 regional communities in Western New South Wales. Recently, Murdi Paaki engaged in planning exercises in which

they listed their top priorities for funding and support—number one was culture, or culture and language.

Finalist Martumili Artists and winner for Category B, the Yiriman Project, are organisations servicing vast expanses of remote Australia, both drawing their strength and purpose from the cultural authority of the elders who lead them. The Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) of Yuendumu—formerly the Mt Theo program—led the first successful program in Central Australia to end petrol sniffing. They did it by using Country and culture. Taking kids out of communities to places where elders and family could care for them by telling them stories, singing them songs, teaching them to understand who they are.

“It's time we take note of this success and work with communities and their organisations to strengthen and support their capacity to take charge of issues that impact them.”

This dynamic and responsive cultural agenda clearly has nothing to do with turning communities into 'cultural museums'. All of the finalists are focused on the future and on creating economies and healthy lives for their communities. But they know that they can't do this on someone else's terms. It won't fit and they have seen it fail time and time again. They know that imbuing young people with a strong sense of their culture

and identity gives them the best chance of finding their way in the world. Embedding culture in communities and young people is a form of Indigenous investment. The people driving these organisations invest their knowledge, time and resources in young people because they know no one else, not teachers, or social workers or governments, can give what they give. The Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)'s vision is of 'an Australian society in which our communities are empowered to determine their own future, where the rights of our children, young people and families are protected, our cultural identity and achievements are valued.'

MG Corporation in Kununurra is having significant success placing local Aboriginal people in work; many for the first time. MG understands the social barriers to employment and the cultural demands that can inhibit certain forms of workplace participation, and have designed flexible and responsive employment models in partnership with employers.

We've tried taking control away from communities and it hasn't worked. People who feel a lack of control over their lives are far more likely to be disengaged. International research like that of Canada's Professor Michael Chandler tells us that communities more in control are healthier, more robust. Communities with less control suffer higher youth suicide rates.

Self-determination is politically unpopular. It's risky because there will be failures, there will be cases with poor outcomes. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to make and implement decisions about their communities and futures is a long-term concern. Self-determination does not

mean communities do it alone, or be left by themselves to grapple with the enormous issues that confront them. The strong organisations I've seen don't do it alone. They bring in expert advisers where necessary, they consult, they bring partners on board. They are explicit about wanting to walk side-by-side with governments, businesses and NGOs.

“Their governance models are rooted in culture, yet entirely modern in their efficiency, legitimacy and accountability.”

NPY Women's Council have a set of sound principles for non-Anangu (Aboriginal) people who come to work and conduct research in their communities. I think they form a good base for the kind of mutual capacity building relationships that are necessary for our communities to thrive.

Maru manu piranpatjunga nyinara wangkara kulilkatinyi—black and white sitting together and discussing over a long period of time.

Kulilkatinyi munu myakukatinyi—listening and looking over a long period of time. Not just observing but becoming part of the community and gaining an understanding of their perspective.

They also insist on *malparara*—which loosely means, working together, or working hand-in-hand.

I know and understand that many Indigenous organisations aren't doing as well as the IGA finalists. It is incredibly tough out there for such entities. The finalists—organisations large and small, remote, regional and urban—told a familiar story of multiple and complicated funding agreements and reporting requirements, creating layers of burdensome red-tape. Then there is their daily battle to see services that are taken for granted by most Australians delivered to their communities. Why should WYDAC have to scrounge, beg and consider sourcing philanthropic support in order to run the town swimming pool? The citizens of most metropolitan suburbs don't have to consider these options as they head towards summer. Why should Western Desert Dialysis patients have to sleep rough in the Todd River to access basic health services in Alice Springs?

In spite of this, and in spite of their often challenging operating environments, strong Indigenous organisations are succeeding in providing innovative and responsive service delivery and advocacy. They are entrepreneurial and proactively creating economic development opportunities for their members and communities. Their governance models are rooted in culture, yet entirely modern in their efficiency, legitimacy and accountability. They all deftly negotiate the terrain between their communities and the requirements of funders and mainstream stakeholders. They are driven by strong partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people; and they show us how such partnerships can work. They are making decisions; they are getting on with their futures. They are self-determination in action.

Professor Mick Dodson is a member of the Yawuru peoples the traditional Aboriginal owners of land and waters in the Broome area of the southern Kimberley region of Western Australia. He is currently the Director of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University and Professor of law at the ANU College of Law.

Professor Dodson was Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. He is a vigorous advocate of the rights and interests of the Indigenous Peoples of the world. He was Chairman of the United Nations Advisory Group for the Voluntary Fund for the Decade of Indigenous Peoples and served for five years as a member of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Indigenous Voluntary Fund. In 2009, he was named Australian of the Year.

Mick is a former Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia and has been Chair of the Indigenous Governance Awards judging panel since 2005.



Appeal for Aboriginal engineers

Engineers Without Borders (EWB) is appealing to the engineering sector to strive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation rates similar to the medical profession.

Earlier this year the Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association announced that the intake of first-year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students in Australian universities had reached a new high of 2.5 per cent, matching the percentage of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

Unfortunately the engineering profession is lagging far behind, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students making up approximately 0.5% of applicants for university courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. EWB believes this needs to change as the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the engineering sector is critical.

There are many opportunities for meaningful Aboriginal employment within the engineering

sector including mining, agriculture, natural resource management, housing and other community infrastructure, and transport. EWB hopes to see Aboriginal engineers throughout the sector leading projects and developing solutions that benefit all Australians.

EWB has a strong emphasis on partnerships and focuses on facilitating two-way knowledge sharing between Aboriginal Australians and the engineering profession. Highlights of EWB's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program include sustainable engineering education and projects focusing on themes such as energy, construction, water and natural resource management on country, and education programs such as study tours, forums and cultural training for the engineering sector. These programs

build the engineering capacity of Aboriginal communities and the capacity of the engineering sector to effectively work with Aboriginal Australians.

EWB applauds the work already undertaken by many in the engineering sector working towards engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but appeals for more to be done. This includes areas of engineering education, career pathways and employment opportunities, contracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and services, and meaningful engagement and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For more information about EWB's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program visit: www.ewb.org.au/aus-partners

The corporate warriors

by Rebecca Gallegos



Dug Russell and Michael McLeod at Message Stick headquarters in Sydney. Image, Cole Bennetts.

Every day we make decisions. Some of them perhaps inconsequential, others can change your life forever. For Michael McLeod—business owner, entrepreneur and mentor—his ‘life-changing’ moment occurred some 20 years ago when he decided to start living a life free from welfare.

“I did a crazy thing—I rejected all welfare in all of its forms from government grants or subsidies to you name it! At the time, someone said to me, well what are you going to live on? And I just thought...I’ll start my own business.”

To understand the courageousness of Michael’s decision to rely solely on himself for survival, you need to understand where he has come from. As the youngest of six, Michael and his siblings were removed from their family when Michael was just 18 months old. Placed with different foster care parents and in numerous children’s homes for all of his childhood and adolescence, Michael managed to finish his HSC while living in a boy’s home in the Blue Mountains. But completing high school was not enough to prevent him from entering a downward spiral of drug and alcohol abuse which eventually saw him sleeping on the streets.

“Drugs and alcohol played a huge role in my life,” he says. “By the time I was in my mid 20’s I was a full-on alcoholic and drug addict. I became homeless—living and begging on the streets of Sydney.”

Despite his demons, Michael believes that he’s one of the ‘lucky ones’. In his early 30’s he was introduced to his first detox and rehabilitation program which saw him eventually discover the person he wanted to be.

“It was in the early days of my recovery and counselling that I was asked one very important question and that was: What were the triggers that kept me locked into the cycle of substance abuse and homelessness?”

Looking back, Michael says it was easy for him identify what was keeping him trapped in a cycle of drugs and alcohol dependency.

“What it was for me was welfare,” explains Michael. “The fact that I just got the dole or a disability pension or there was a subsidy for employment from

governments to businesses, anything that had this sense of a hand-out mentality around it was the catalyst for me that prevented me from growing and from having dreams or aspirations for the future.”

Michael went on to develop Australia’s first Indigenous internet service provider, starting his entrepreneurial journey in the Illawarra area. Over time he developed his skills and established and ran an IT venture for six years, before it began to stall.

“Michael says that both he and Dug had similar beliefs about why they wanted to be involved in setting up an Indigenous business.”

“Back then I didn’t understand the concept of how to really administer a business successfully,” says Michael. “I had a great vision—but lacked the skills.”

Rather than give-up and revert back to welfare or start working for someone else, Michael sought advice from a friend. He needed what he called “a corporate warrior”.

“I approached my dear friend Rick Farley and said, mate, I’m not getting anywhere I actually need help from someone in the business sector—a corporate warrior.”

Twelve months later Rick contacted Michael saying he had the perfect person in mind. Someone who had the drive and passion to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—and the business experience and know-how to make it

happen. That person was Dugald Russell. Dug, as he is better known, was also a friend to Rick and had told him he was looking for an Aboriginal person to build a business with.

Michael says that both he and Dug had similar beliefs about why they wanted to be involved in setting up an Indigenous business.

“Within two minutes of meeting him, I knew he was it and we were set for life,” he says. “Dug believed that change could come around if Aboriginal people who owned their own businesses were successful because it would change their whole mindset, allow them to become financially independent, to own assets, grow wealth and like anyone else in Australia become successful.”

Dug grew up in the country town of Wauchope on the NSW mid-north coast but wasn’t always passionate about working with Aboriginal people.

“When I grew up the interaction I had with Aboriginal people was not great—in fact it was terrible. We used to play rugby league against Taree and Kempsey Indigenous teams and there were always fights.”

Like many Australians, Dug grew up having a very one sided view of Indigenous Australia, with no understanding or chance to build meaningful relationships with the Aboriginal people in his community. But the turning point for Dug happened by chance when he and a friend decided to hitch hike to Perth during a university break. At 20 years of age Dug and his friend found themselves unsuccessfully trying to hitch to Port Augusta. With the prospect of sleeping on the side of the road fast becoming a reality Dug was relieved, and admittedly a bit apprehensive, to see a car full of Aboriginal men stop and offer the pair a lift.

“This was the only car that actually stopped for us and four big smiling faces said to us: hey guys, do you want a lift?

Up until that point we had a very negative attitude, but that day was a turning point for both my friend and I.”

Dug and his friend spent the next week travelling with the group of Aboriginal men who took them to Ceduna to meet their friends and families. They were both able to get to know them, their communities and their circumstances, and Dug’s interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and issues grew from there.

After finishing university, Dug found success in corporate finance and was able to secure senior positions both here and overseas. Eventually though, he reached a point where that wasn’t enough. It was no longer fulfilling to work for someone else and he had a growing desire to combine business with his passion for effecting Indigenous economic development.

“When I achieved my corporate goal of becoming a CEO, I really wasn’t that excited about it,” explains Dug. “At the time [around 10–15 years ago] a wise mentor said it was because I didn’t think there was any purpose or meaning to my job. He said I would never really be happy unless I had that purpose and meaning in my day-to-day work.”

After meeting at a coffee shop in Pitt Street, Dug and Michael started their dream business, Message Stick, in 2003. Their goal was to create a successful Aboriginal business without government or corporate funding. They wanted it to simply be about doing commercial business.

Looking back on the early days of Message Stick now, both Michael and Dug believe it was a new area for Aboriginal-owned businesses.

“Not many Aboriginal people at that time thought of stepping outside of community,” Michael said. “This entrepreneurial concept hadn’t really moved anywhere within Aboriginal Australia—although there were many Aboriginal people who were starting their own businesses, they were just struggling and it was hard for Aboriginal businesses to break into the corporate business sector.”

Michael also says the business sector was hesitant to try and manage relationships with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander business owners.

“They didn’t want to get it wrong essentially—they had their reasons, they wanted to be politically correct, but they didn’t know how to engage properly with Aboriginal businesses.”

In the first two years Dug and Michael’s business made little to no profit. Instead they focused on building the foundations of the business and ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would support their new concept of stepping outside community.

“This entrepreneurial concept hadn’t really moved anywhere within Aboriginal Australia—although there were many Aboriginal people who were starting their own businesses, they were just struggling and it was hard for Aboriginal businesses to break into the corporate business sector.”

“Looking back there was curiosity—but a lot of support particularly from Aboriginal elders,” Michael says. “At the time we didn’t really know what the future would look like for Aboriginal people itself—but what I did know from the moment I met Dug and started Message Stick, was that we wouldn’t be reliant on the policy of the day.”

Eventually Michael and Dug established relationships with some corporate organisations who were interested in finding a sustainable way to support Aboriginal people while reducing their internal costs.

“Corporates saw the chance of doing businesses with me as something unique and in terms of increasing their supplier diversity where they could reduce their internal costs and support Aboriginal business and their communities at the same time,” explains Michael. “It was a win-win situation...a no-brainer really!”

In the first year of trading, Message Stick secured contracts with ten of Australia’s top corporates and from there the company grew into a successful and profitable communications group that is also helping to promote Indigenous Australia’s engagement with Australian and global business. Now in its ninth year of operation, The Message Stick Group has stood by its original visions and objectives. This includes a strong commitment to reconciliation by providing a working example in the business environment of how positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can thrive and produce meaningful outcomes.

Essential to Message Stick’s success has been the relationship between Dug and Michael. They were open and honest with each other from the beginning and knew that to make it work they had to genuinely trust and understand each other—even with the chance that their venture might fail.

Recalling their first meeting, Dug agrees that he knew immediately that Michael was ‘the one’.

“Michael to me fitted the bill perfectly,” he says. “I didn’t know he was a recovering alcoholic, that he’d been homeless or that he was part of the Stolen Generations—I just saw a guy that was prepared to trust me and took the things I was saying about not making any money for the first couple of years quite easily.”

“Now we’re like brothers. Although we are business partners, we’re very close, we’re like family to each other—as are the other two guys that work at Message Stick.”

Although Dug was a mentor to Michael, particularly during the first few years of Message Stick, he says that Michael has also taught him many valuable life lessons such as having the confidence to take a risk.

“He’s taught me to ‘have a go’ more, rather than think about things too much... And he’s taught me humility because he’s so humble himself. He’s gone from nothing to now being very successful—but it hasn’t changed him at all. A lot of people lose a bit of humility when their social and economic circumstances change—Michael’s not lost any of that.”

Michael says it was important for him to ensure that his learnings from Dug were handed over to like-minded Aboriginal people. The creation of the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC) in 2009 was the perfect model to build a more sustainable, prosperous and vibrant Indigenous enterprise sector. Now lead by Natalie Walker, AIMSC is helping more non-Indigenous organisations to connect with Indigenous owned suppliers and businesses—from catering, design, communication and IT services. AIMSC

“There will always be barriers, but it’s your ability to be staunch and stubborn that will overcome them—that’s a long lesson for me to have learnt.”

membership is also supported by the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with RAP organisations spending \$26 million on suppliers certified by AIMSC.

“Through AIMSC I’ve been able to mentor Aboriginal business owners,” Michael says. “Having been successful in my business I

have a greater obligation to give back and to never forget where I came from. As I move forward this feeling of responsibility has become stronger.”

Michael believes in creating your own reality. This belief has been embedded in his conscious since his decision to reject welfare back in his 30s and is something he shares with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business owners.

“In the morning, whatever it is you aspire and dream to do that day you will move towards,” he says. “There will always be barriers, but it’s your ability to be staunch and stubborn that will overcome them—that’s a long lesson for me to have learnt.”

“And the more successful you become, in whatever area, the more that helps to rewire your mind to be able to tackle problems. If you’re feeling that pride in your self-worth—that’s a good thing and it’s rare to go back unless you lose faith in yourself.”



Image, Cole Bennetts.



Australian business and reconciliation

by Peter Nash, Chairman, KPMG Australia and Reconciliation Australia Board Director

Image courtesy KPMG.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as the First Australians, represent a significant part of our history, our culture and our national identity. Equally important is the role they have to play in shaping Australia's future. In my opinion, until we are reconciled, we cannot, as a nation, reach our full potential and the business community has a critical role to play in achieving this important goal.

Through KPMG's commitment to Indigenous engagement, my role on the Koori Heritage Trust and more recently, my position on the Board of Reconciliation Australia, I have the opportunity to actively participate in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. Visits to Indigenous communities in the far north west, Redfern in New South Wales and Shepparton in Victoria have all served to demonstrate to me just how effective and important business engagement is on this journey towards reconciliation.

I am in the fortunate position to be able to combine my career and personal commitment to reconciliation. As a board member, I am able to draw on my corporate

experience as we think about initiatives and outcomes that address the issues and challenges that face Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In my role as National Chairman of KPMG, I meet regularly with leaders in business and government and have the opportunity to talk about the importance of business support for reconciliation. The genuine interest and desire by our business leaders to contribute in a meaningful way is encouraging.

Business with a strong sense of social justice and a commitment to travel the right path towards social equity has a vital role in progressing reconciliation. The business community is for the most part, interested in a strong and prosperous Australia for all Australians. A reconciled Indigenous community will make a substantial contribution by participating more fully in economic Australia.

We have come a long way and there are many leading Australian companies that have committed to reconciliation and are taking steps to bridge the gap of understanding and opportunity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.

At KPMG we have marked our third year of commitment to a Reconciliation Action Plan wherein we formalise our commitment to fostering relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

We do this through business leadership, where we provide our professional skills to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to build capacity; cultural awareness, where we foster a deeper level of respect and understanding of Indigenous Australia within our people and our clients; and, through Indigenous employment, where we increase education opportunities through scholarships, cadetships and work experience programs, and where possible, procure services from Indigenous-owned businesses.

KPMG's aspiration is for a united Australia with the best of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Reconciliation is a vital success factor. I know that our work with Indigenous Australia has changed us for the better, and I encourage businesses that haven't yet started on their reconciliation journey to do so.

Women of influence

Nine Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women have been recognised in the top-100 shortlist of the 2012 Women of Influence Awards.

Run by Westpac and the Australian Financial Review, the Awards recognise a new generation of women who are achievers in Australian business and society.

Reconciliation Australia's CEO Leah Armstrong, Board Director Kirstie Parker and You Me Unity Deputy Campaign Director Tanya Hosch were included in the shortlist.

The other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recipients, many of whom are part of the reconciliation family, are: Dawn Casey, Powerhouse Museum; Merindah Donnelly, Australian Council for the Arts; April Long, National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy; Jodie Sizer, Ingenuity Australia; Natalie Walker, Australian Indigenous Minority Suppliers Council and Nareen Young, Diversity Council of Australia, who took out the diversity category.

Indigenous Governance Awards judge and CEO of the Business Council of Australia Jennifer Westacott and former Reconciliation Australia Board Director Sam Mostyn were also on the list.

The '100 Women of Influence Awards' were open to the general public to nominate outstanding and influential women across the corporate, community, arts, philanthropy, and public and not-for-profit sectors. Over 300 nominations were received with a diverse representation of women from across the country who demonstrated significant influence either in their business, local communities and globally.



Holden signs on a new team

A dozen new apprentices have signed on with Holden as part of the Aboriginal Recruitment Training (ART) Employment scheme.

Under the guidance of ART Employment, 23 job seekers underwent a training program including a seven week pre-employment training scheme. Eighteen participants went on to complete stage two of the 17-week accredited training program which resulted in them achieving a TAFE Certificate 1 in Engineering.

Participants were then interviewed by Holden, with 12 successful applicants securing apprenticeships and a four-year employment contract with Holden.

The new apprentices have been placed in various shops across the company, learning their trade of Mechanical Fitter under the watchful eyes of Holden's experts.

ART Employment Managing Director Allan Jones said: "Seeing these job seekers secure an apprenticeship at Holden is a great achievement. They've worked hard to get here throughout the training program and we're very proud. The opportunities for Indigenous job seekers can be limited and we thank companies such as Holden for participating in these programs.

Holden executive manufacturing director Richard Phillips said the program was a great opportunity for the apprentices.

"This is a wonderful program and a great opportunity for the apprentices and we're proud to support it. Holden has always prided itself on our 'fair go' mentality and giving these apprentices the means to learn a trade and build a career is fantastic. Working with ART Employment to achieve this outcome has been a rewarding experience and I'm looking forward to seeing these apprentices go on to rewarding careers."

The Apprenticeship Program supports the Australian Government and their 'Closing the Gap' Strategy by offering real employment and career pathway outcomes for Aboriginal job seekers residing in the northern regions of Adelaide.

Racism. It stops with me

Reconciliation Australia has joined forces with some of Australia's leading community organisations, businesses and government agencies to support the *Racism. It Stops With Me.* campaign.

The new national anti-racism campaign aims to increase understanding of the damaging impact of racism and give Australians the tools and resources to take action when they see or experience racism.

At the launch of the National Agenda for Racial Equality in August, Race Discrimination Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission, Dr Helen Szoke, said the campaign is aimed at encouraging all Australians to take ownership of the issue.

"If we are going to continue to develop positively in tackling racism and promoting equal opportunity, then we have to win hearts and minds, we have to work in partnership and more importantly we have to own this issue as one for all Australians," she said.

Reconciliation Australia Co-Chair, and former Race Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Tom Calma said racism was a significant obstacle to achieving a reconciled Australia.

"We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to experience high levels of direct and indirect racism and I think it's time to have some tough conversations, to really stop and think about how we can all work together to address this serious issue," Dr Calma said.

To get involved in the campaign visit www.itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au.





Reconciliation.

Everyone's
business.

Businesses across Australia are making smarter choices in the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through Reconciliation Action Plans.

Today, more than 350 of Australia's largest corporations, not-for-profit organisations, progressive government agencies and dedicated schools and universities have committed to a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

If your business is not part of the RAP community, now is the time to join.

Reconciliation is everyone's business.

Image courtesy Qantas

www.reconciliation.org.au get involved

