

Let's talk...

Women of Influence



*Each year on March 8, International Women's Day provides an opportunity to reflect on the achievements and the challenges that women have faced in our recent history as well as those challenges that we are yet to overcome—economically, politically and socially. The contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to the nation, as mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunties, is immense. This fact sheet celebrates their efforts to build stronger communities and a more just Australia for the generations to come.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this website may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.

## Women of Influence

The inaugural '100 Women of Influence Awards' run by Westpac and the Australian Financial Review recognise a new generation of women who are achievers in Australian business and society. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have been honoured in past years, including:

- Leah Armstrong, Reconciliation Australia
- Dawn Casey, Powerhouse Museum
- Merindah Donnelly, Australia Council for the Arts
- Tanya Hosch, Recognise campaign
- April Long, National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy
- Kirstie Parker, Koori Mail
- Jodie Sizer, Ingenuity Australia
- Natalie Walker, Supply Nation
- Nareen Young, Diversity Council of Australia



## Did you know?

- **Lowitja O'Donoghue** was the first Aboriginal woman to be inducted into the new Order of Australia.
- In 1959, **Margaret Williams** became the first Aboriginal university graduate in Australia. She received a diploma in Physical Education.
- In 2011, **Rebecca Richards** became the first Aboriginal person to be awarded a Rhodes Scholarship.
- **Cathy Freeman** is the only person to have won both the Young Australian and Australian of the Year Awards.
- **Carol Martin** was elected to the Western Australian Legislative Assembly in 2001, becoming the first Aboriginal woman elected to an Australian Parliament. There are four Aboriginal women currently serving in Australian Parliaments.

## **Meet... Andrea Mason**

Andrea Mason is part of a new generation of Aboriginal women playing leadership roles in their communities. As the coordinator of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, Andrea is committed to delivering long term positive change to the communities across the NPY Lands. This is a responsibility she has been delivering since joining the NPY Women's Council in 2008.

Andrea's relationship to the NPY Lands is strong both professionally and personally. Her mother's people are Karonie people from WA and her father was born in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands between Jameson and Warburton, in WA. Andrea believes her role is one of being a custodian for the hopes and dreams of the women of the NPY Lands and she is committed to doing all she can to see those dreams realised.

The NPY Women's Council was born out of the desire for women to have a strong voice in the land rights battle. Since then it has grown to deliver community, health and safety programs across an area comprising more than twenty-five communities and homelands spread over a vast 350,000 square kilometres of the NT, WA, and SA. NPY puts women's lore and culture at the centre of everything they do. The award-winning Ngangkari (traditional healing) and Tjanpi (fibre art) projects demonstrate how this organisation reflects the strength, creativity and resilience of its desert base.



Andrea believes she has the best job in the world. She works with strong Aboriginal women and along-side a group of highly committed Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, who give their best every day to see the objectives of the organisation realised. She sees herself as a social entrepreneur, working in the right job, at the right time, delivering with the guidance of NPY Women's Council Directors, transformative change that will enable women and families of the region to live in safe and healthy communities.

Andrea also recognises the profound influence that women have had on her life, both personally and professionally. This International Women's Day she recognises four inspirational women.

### ***Lesley Wanganeen***

"Her people are Narungga on the Yorke Peninsula, SA. She was my first Indigenous manager—I think I was about 25 years of age when I joined her team. A highly professional leader, she was also compassionate, had a great sense of humour and was fiercely committed to encouraging me and other young Aboriginal people to step up and have a go in the workplace. She also showed me that to be a leader you have to be brave if you want to see change."

### ***Marjorie Jackson Nelson AC, CVO MBE***

"Marjorie is so down to earth she is the same person wherever she is. She laughs easily and her love for people shines through in everything she does. She has taught me to be genuine and to always give my best effort even if no one is watching."

## **Yanyi Bandicha and Margaret Smith**

“These women are the current and former chairpersons of NPY Women’s Council. They have been my teachers and malpas (friend), they have shown me to fulfil my responsibilities working with, through and for NPY women and their families and that if I operate there I won’t lose my way.”

## **Women of the 1967 Referendum**

There are many stories worth repeating about the road to the referendum that removed a handful of words from Australia’s Constitution in 1967. Among these are the stories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Faith Bandler and Jessie Street, who worked together in a campaign that started in kitchens and local community halls and stretched around the world. Read their stories here [Women of 1967 Referendum](#).

Now another big moment lies before us – the chance to fix our Constitution so that it recognises the First Australians, and for us to forge our future together. To get this done, we will once again need the leadership of all those who have inspired and led at each of the big moments in our national story. To find out more visit [www.recognise.org.au](http://www.recognise.org.au).

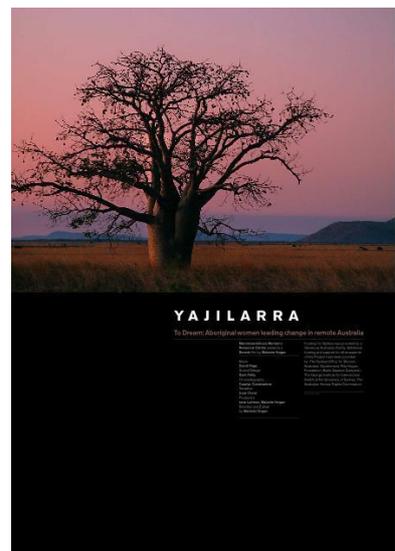
## **Yajilarra**

Yajilarra is a film about a group of Aboriginal women from Fitzroy Crossing in remote northern Western Australia. They are determined to save the town from the scourge of alcohol abuse, domestic violence and foetal alcohol syndrome.

In 2007 the community had experienced 13 suicides in as many months. Reports of family violence and child abuse are commonplace and alcohol consumption is rising at an alarming rate.

Something had to be done. Something had to change. For everyone in their community, the results were inspiring and the healing has now begun.

To order a copy of the movie, please contact the Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre on (08) 9191 5284 or at [projects@mwrc.com.au](mailto:projects@mwrc.com.au). All proceeds from the movie go towards research into foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.



## **Take Action**

- Attend one of the many [International Women's Day Events](#) happening around the country.
- Read about the [Women of the 1967 Referendum](#).
- Join the Women’s Reconciliation Network. Email [nswrc@nswreconciliation.org.au](mailto:nswrc@nswreconciliation.org.au) for more information.

*Reconciliation Australia would like to thank The Koori Mail, Fairfax, Andrea Mason, Bruce Hunt from Revolver and Wayne Quilliam for their photographs.*

*Reconciliation Australia is the national body promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)*