

ReconciliationNews

ISSUE NO 24 // August 2012

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**on the
importance
of community**

Walking together
**in the
Pilbara**

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**Reconciliation
AUSTRALIA**

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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
A U S T R A L I A

CEO message

Reconciliation really is everyone's business and in this issue of *Reconciliation News* we will showcase some of the positive work that is happening out there in the community.

Things like the fantastic public festival and events in Townsville for Mabo Day; the constructive reconciliation work that's taking place in the Anglican Church; through to local history projects in the Pilbara and the bold steps being taken by Queensland Rugby Union. They are all solid examples that reconciliation is appearing everywhere. And our beautiful cover image, by Bentley James, shows 2012 Senior Australian of the Year Laurie Baymarrwangga recently receiving her award with members of her community in a remote part of Arnhem Land. In the face of many obstacles, this great, great grandmother has shown extraordinary leadership and courage in caring for the cultural and biological integrity of her beloved Crocodile Islands. Laurie is a strong community leader and an inspiration for us all.

At Reconciliation Australia, the first six months of this year have brought many good things. We've celebrated what is arguably our largest National Reconciliation Week—with more than 600 registered events, and hundreds of thousands of people taking part right across the nation.

We've received a record number of nominations for the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards. This year, some 110 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations were nominated for the important work they're doing in their communities. The winners will be announced at a special luncheon event in October.

We have also launched a new training program called Workplace Ready. This program provides a forum in which organisations can enhance their ability to create the right internal culture and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister announced that Reconciliation Australia would lead the public education and awareness campaign for recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

The campaign office is now up and running and I'd like to welcome the new members of the *You Me Unity* team on board.

Led by Tim Gartrell and Tanya Hosch, the team will be working to see that our founding document recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first Australians and becomes inclusive and fair for all of us. This is the next milestone in the reconciliation journey.

Finally, I'd like to extend my warm and heartfelt congratulations to our Co-Chair Dr Tom Calma and former Board Director Shelley Reys for their recent Order of Australia honours. They are both tireless campaigners for social justice and have dedicated decades to the community—and to reconciliation.

I hope you enjoy this latest edition of *Reconciliation News*.

Leah Armstrong
Chief Executive Officer





Respectful relationships: a two-way thing

In June this year, Reconciliation Australia Deputy CEO Chris Kirby was part of a group who were lucky enough to travel to the remote community of Bawaka in North East Arnhem Land. Met by traditional owner Djawa (Timmy) Burarrawanga and his family, the group spent two days living on Yolngu land and learning about the ways of the Yolngu people. But despite Bawaka's obvious beauty, it was the people and the stories that were shared which had the most effect on Chris' experience.

I could write about the sweeping white sand beaches, the laden coconut palms, the towering dunes from which the local lore was born or the adventurous, bumpy ride along a sand half-pipe track to get there—but that would be missing the point.

The point, for me—of visiting the remote Aboriginal homeland of Bawaka in North East Arnhem Land—was to experience how two cultures coming together actually makes both of them stronger rather than having a diluting effect. This is an important part of the future of reconciliation. It is about all parties being richer for having built a better understanding of each other.

The family who took us to their traditional lands have crafted an experience that leaves

everyone enriched. The days we spent together took the form of a conversation that evolved and built as we learned more about each other. Those of us from other parts of Australia gradually felt our shoulders relax and our physical pace slow but our minds became full and engaged with new ideas and concepts that took shapes we had not always encountered before. For Timmy and his family there was also learning. They came to understand our motivations and our histories; how we had constructed our lives and our relationships; our involvement so far with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.

This mutual learning came from the building of relationships. Some relationships will

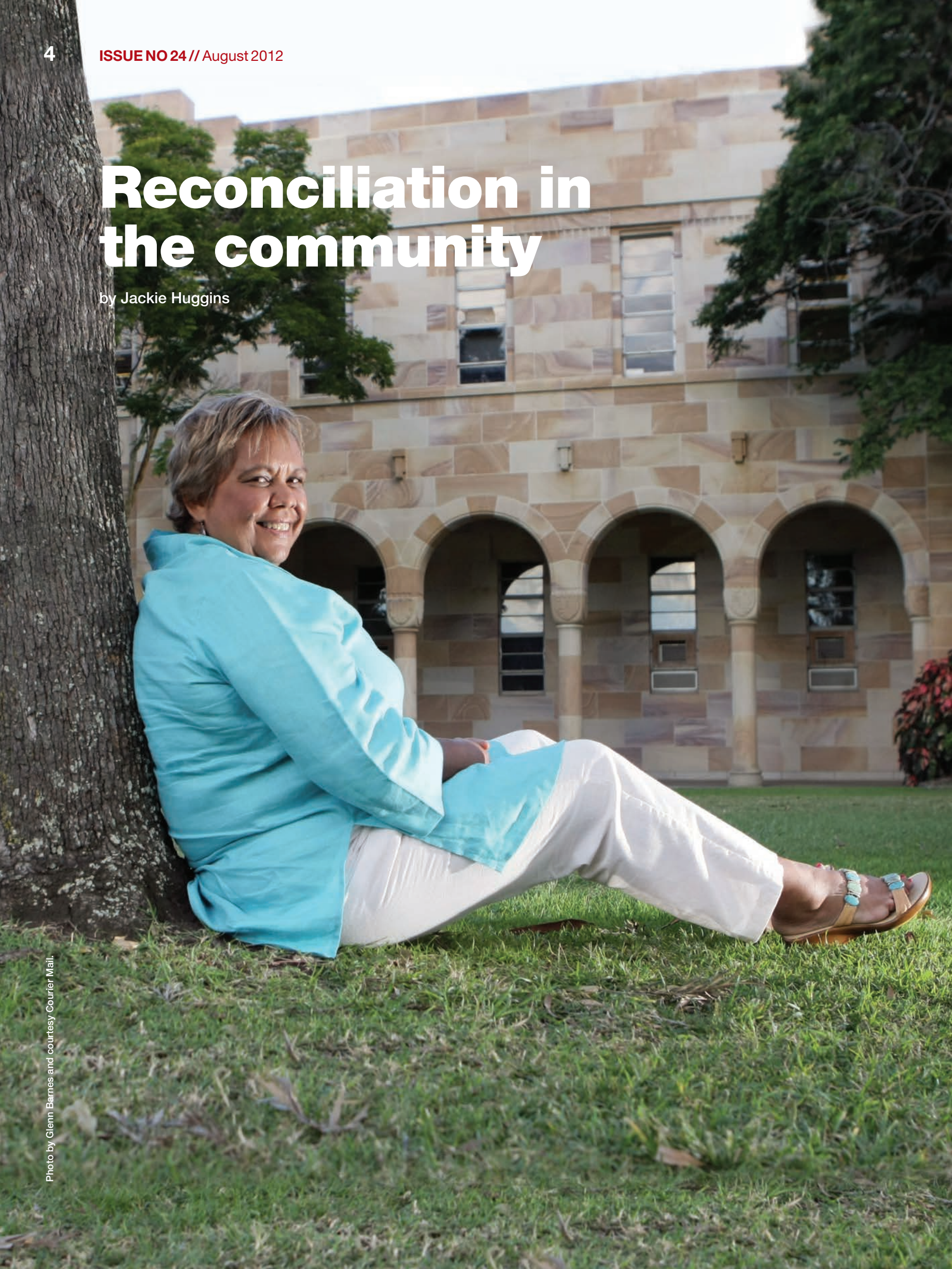
last and some will be fleeting but all were respectful of each of our unique stories.

A respectful relationship is a two way thing. Each learns and draws strength from the other. This principle is the underpinning of reconciliation. We have to find ways to (re)build respectful relationships between the First Peoples of Australia and those of us that are more recent arrivals. There are plenty of people engaged in this quest. The great pleasure of my job is that I get to work with them and meet with them every day. The Bawaka cultural tourism business is a wonderful example of how these sorts of relationships pay dividends for all those involved.

More information about Bawaka Cultural Experiences: www.bawaka.com.au

Reconciliation in the community

by Jackie Huggins



Working in and for her community, is something Dr Jackie Huggins AM FAHA has done for decades with determination and passion. As one of Australia's most respected Aboriginal leaders and historians, Dr Huggins has a long list of credentials and is currently a director of the Telstra Foundation and Patron of Reconciliation Queensland Inc. (RQI). In 2001, the then Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia was awarded an Order of Australia for her work with Indigenous communities—particularly reconciliation, literacy, women's issues and social justice. Her heritage, experiences and love of history, have all contributed to her deep understanding of life and people and have made her a force behind important Indigenous initiatives in Queensland and Australia. In June she journeyed to North Queensland to take part in the Townsville Reconciliation Festival and mark the 20th anniversary of the *Mabo* decision.

While taking part in yarning circles at the Townsville Reconciliation Festival I spoke with all walks of life; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, non-Indigenous people, young fellas and elders, and was encouraged by what I saw and heard.

The yarning circles are a really powerful space to build personal relationships with people and to break down stereotypes. I felt there were mature conversations happening; and this reflected for me how far we have come in this country. While at the same time there is still a long way to go.

I remember one young non-Indigenous mum partaking in a particular yarning circle; admitting that when growing up she had not had much exposure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures or been educated in the history of Indigenous Australia. She felt however it was important for her baby daughter to have a different experience; to gain an understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

Moments and events like these are a fine example of reconciliation working and flourishing at a community level. Bringing together communities to share wisdom is something that should be undertaken throughout Australia to help build real grassroots, community-led change and reconciliation.

When reconciliation is happening at the community level, real change will happen. The festival not only brought people of like minds together, but also people with little to no knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history; who were eager to learn more. The challenge still remains in engaging and educating people who are

not informed about reconciliation; but the Townsville Reconciliation Festival was a perfect opportunity; with the rich culture on display for all to soak in.

It was a celebration of reconciliation, but also to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the *Mabo* decision, and I felt extremely honoured to be celebrating this with the *Mabo* family, along with the Townsville community and people from all around the country.

“Bringing together communities to share wisdom is something that should be undertaken throughout Australia to help build real grassroots community led change and reconciliation.”

Young and old came together and it was uplifting to see Elders with tears in their eyes as the young ones danced the traditional way; a cultural exchange and passing down of knowledge happening right in front of us.

It made me feel proud that reconciliation is still alive and well and there are many people that still believe firmly in their hearts and minds reconciliation is an honourable exercise. I strongly believe if lessons are

learnt we will be able to get along a lot better in this country and to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues understood and be sure they are acted upon.

My history with reconciliation is a long and cherished one; I was on the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, I was a founding member for Reconciliation Australia as well as former Co-Chair and I am now a Patron for Reconciliation Queensland Inc. Growing up I always had a sense of social justice; a legacy I inherited from my mother who was involved in the reconciliation process long before the term was even coined.

Reconciliation means three things to me: recognition, justice and healing. Firstly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be recognised and celebrated as the First Australians. We must acknowledge that this land was in fact not uninhabited as the *Mabo* decision proved and that we have a history long before colonisation. Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians would be a meaningful and logical step in recognising our First Australians. Incorporating this formal recognition in our nation's founding document is long overdue and an opportunity for all Australians to come together to not dwell on the past, but to create a future that is inclusive for our children, and our children's children for that matter.

Justice is an integral and necessary component of reconciliation. As a nation we must deal with the horrible statistics in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in terms of health, employment, education, and incarceration rates to name a few. It is our responsibility as human beings to encourage and actualise justice in

this country. We must ask ourselves how are we able to work with our community and develop partnerships to eradicate these statistics and to close the gaps in these areas.

And lastly, healing is a vital element. We all have to heal as a nation; but we must join together in this process. The way to do this is around a better community education process by which all people will come to understand about our shared histories and our culture, and provide a way forward for all of us as Australians.

Travelling around Queensland I am always keen to discuss reconciliation, which is why the progression from Reconciliation Australia to Reconciliation Queensland was natural for me; I will always have an ongoing relationship with the reconciliation movement.

Through my lifetime I have seen how the movement has progressed and has really hit the ground running on a community level.

“Everyday I see better partnerships being shaped and facilitated between all groups and all levels of society.”

Growing up I felt like Indigenous people did not get an opportunity to express our views, and interests publicly and on a large scale, as well as at the community level.

With the younger generation I am delighted that there is a much more sophisticated and deliberate attempt from young people to build those bridges and to have conversations that my generation were not as confident nor had the capacity and opportunity to do so—particularly with politicians, decision makers and people of influence.

I have witnessed the development of far more dialogue and discussion around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, and this is at the forefront of inciting change. Everyday I see better partnerships being shaped and facilitated between all groups and all levels of society. Without the work, collaborations and commitment between individuals we cannot expect that we will be truly reconciled.

But, how far have we come? I believe we've made gigantic steps forward in a short space of time considering the length and the breath of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander occupation in this country.

The experience I had growing up differs in a lot of ways for many Indigenous kids these days and I think that is testament to what we have achieved.

One of the Komet Torres Strait Islander dancers celebrates the 20th anniversary of the Mabo decision at the Townsville Reconciliation Festival. Photo by Phoebe Dent.



People always ask me about how reconciliation will be realised in this country and I say two things; education and more education. After this; action.

More education is the key for our people and for our community to understand the issues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face. People must acquire and take the opportunity to gain the skills and understanding to work with Indigenous people and to make decisions made on clarity, purpose and honesty. It is through this sensitive, intelligible and aware type of approach to tackling the issues that will lead to results.

This is how it works at a community level and this is how it can work for individuals; to do their part in the reconciliation journey. People must educate themselves and their families and communities; there is just no excuse. There is access to an abundance of resources to assist people in getting educated.

Taking part in events like National Reconciliation Week and the Townsville Reconciliation Festival is a perfect way for people to proactively inform themselves. We cannot use the excuse that we are not aware or that it is not up to us; because reconciliation is up to everyone. Educating ourselves and our communities is a key action to quash stereotypes, instigate change and incite passion and accountability within society.

Throughout my schooling, I was never exposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and there was a tendency to steer away from Indigenous history, culture and ideas. It has always been my dream to get these views taught in schools and through the national curriculum I have seen a dream begin to come true.

To see topics like the Stolen Generations and the *Mabo* decision more widely discussed through classrooms across the country is something that I would have never expected growing up. This gives me hope that we as Australians are willing to learn and to move on together, it is this younger generation that will take the reconciliation movement where it needs to go. Starting these conversations early in the classroom will inspire future leaders.

When informing ourselves we must be conscious of discussing our thoughts and ideas with Aboriginal and Torres Strait



Islander peoples. No longer can we put this to one side and use guilt as a way of escaping the truths and injustices. We can instigate genuine discussions around topics of Indigenous interest and extend our hands of friendship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

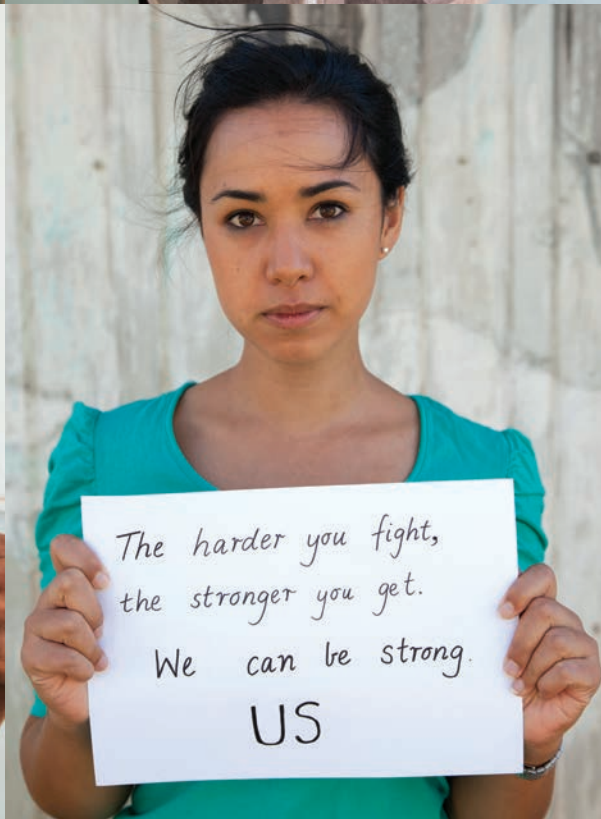
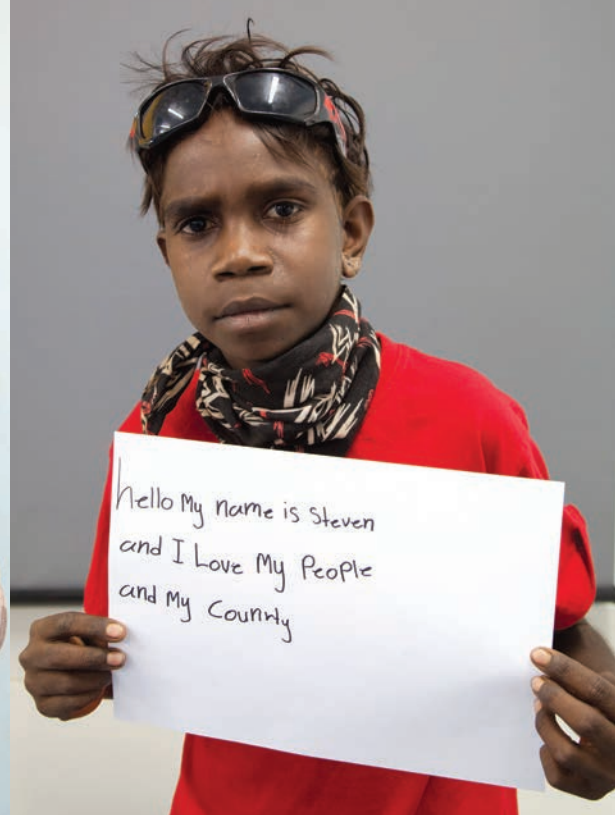
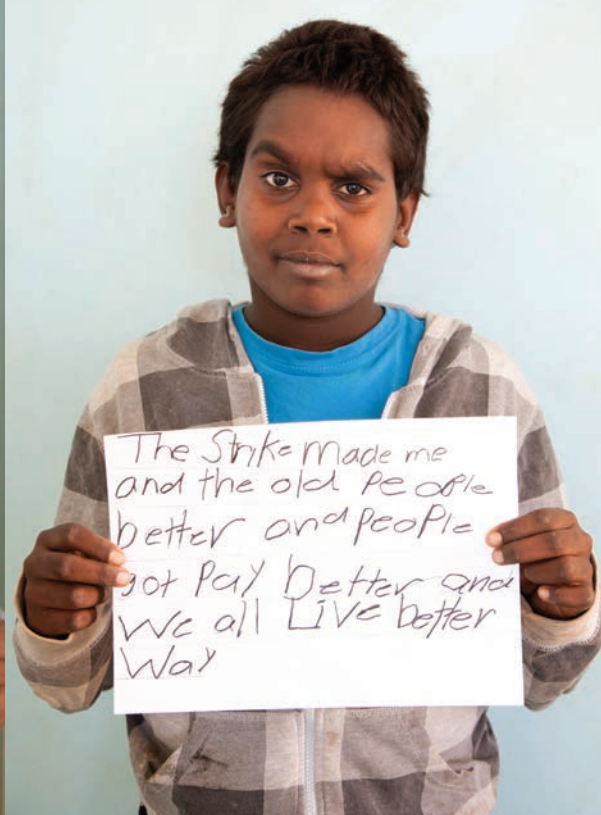
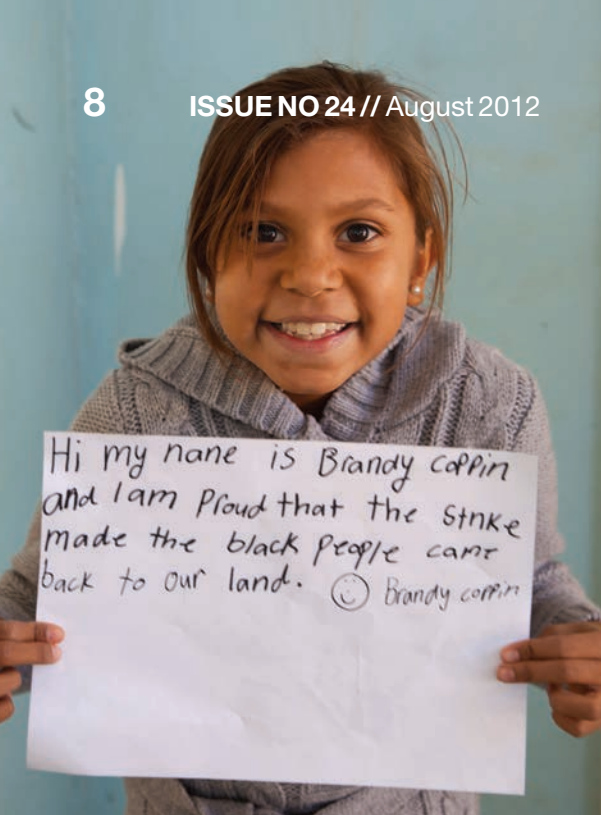
“Starting these conversations early in the classroom will inspire future leaders.”

It is our duty as citizens of this country to cherish our First Australians, be proud and celebrate this unique culture that makes Australia what it is. We cannot ignore the past, or be scared of what we could uncover, because facing up to the realities will only be beneficial in changing the relationship between Indigenous Australians and other Australians.

Dr Jackie Huggins (right) with Les Malezer, Co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, and Prof Megan Davis, UN expert member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, at Mabo Day festivities in Townsville. Photo by Phoebe Dent.

Reconciliation will always be in our lifetime; it's a continual process. It is generational and those of us, who have helped sow the seed for a better future, know that it has a cascading effect that will never diminish. I'm a firm believer when you treat people with respect, they should give it back to you.

Back at the Townsville Reconciliation Festival, Indigenous and non-Indigenous women were telling their stories and sharing their experiences. Through the tears of the participants, there was a realisation that at the heart of reconciliation is the plain and simple idea that we are all humans. We all feel, we all experience and we all relate to one another on a humanistic level that is innate to us. It is when we realise this; reconciliation will always be a human experience that we all have our equal part in.



Walking together

sharing a history of personal stories

The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House is no ordinary museum. Committed to engaging with communities across Australia, their travelling exhibitions are allowing for better collaboration with every-day Australians. *Marnti warajanga—a walk together* is the museum's latest outreach program, developed in association with the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre and photographer Tobias Titz. Visitors to the museum in Canberra would recognise the larger than life photographs accompanied with hand-written comments by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from the Pilbara in Western Australia.

The museum's Director, Jenny Anderson, who recently visited the exhibition while it was in the community of Yandeyarra says *Marnti warajanga* grew out of the community-focused exhibition *Right to be Counted* created by Tobias Titz in 2007. *Right to be Counted* focused on the 1967 Referendum and was a joint project by FORM in Perth and the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre in South Hedland.

"The collaboration with, and respect for the community is evident in that first stage of the exhibition's life, it gave it a strong foundation as a truly collaborative project and that's what first attracted the interest of the museum," Ms Anderson said.

"When Mr Titz asked the museum to consider joining the project in 2009, we visited the Pilbara where we met Wangka Maya, and through them, the community of Port Hedland."

"What struck us immediately was the generosity of the community in sharing their history with us—and the power of the stories they told."

Top row, left to right: Brandy Coppin comments on the 1946 Strike, Zachariah Herbert comments on the 1946 Strike, Steven Wonadon comments on Country. Middle row, left to right: Ronald Flatfoot comments on the 1967 Referendum, Upper secondary teacher Jessica Albers responds to the exhibition, Isaiah Coppin comments on the 1967 Referendum. Bottom row, left to right: Theo Gordon comments on the Apology to the Stolen Generations, Principal Graham Boyd responds to the exhibition, Tamika Herbert comments on the 1946 Strike. Photos Tobias Titz. Courtesy Museum of Australian Democracy.

One of the stories featured in *Marnti warajanga* is the landmark 1946 Strike—Australia's longest running strike lasting over three years. The 1946 Pilbara strike was a key milestone for Aboriginal workers in the Pilbara who sought recognition and payment of equal wages and working conditions.

"It was a story the community wanted to feature in the exhibition," says Ms Anderson.

"It is represented here along with other examples of democratic action, including the important grass roots work by communities and language centres to collect and preserve the many Indigenous languages of the region."

Marnti warajanga also showcases how other significant milestones in the reconciliation journey, and in Australia's history, affected those living in the Pilbara. Hundreds of portraits were taken of participants during workshops and conversations with Mr Titz and the exhibition curators. The subjects then used a leather awl (a sharp, spike-like instrument) to write something of their choice into the wet 'empty' negative. Their words are a response to questions posed to them during the photo shoot and touch on important events such as the 1967 Referendum, the *Mabo* decision, the Apology as well as the 1946 Strike.

The exhibition has developed over the last four years and now encompasses three versions: a travelling exhibition, an online version and an outdoor version designed to withstand the harsh conditions of the Pilbara. The outdoor version was presented in the

Pilbara by a team of three from the museum—including photographer Mr Titz—with the objective of involving the communities in a conversation about their history. Upon tour completion in June 2012, the outdoor version was donated to the Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre.

"What struck us immediately was the generosity of the community in sharing their history with us—and the power of the stories they told."

"The exhibition has toured to the communities of South Hedland, Warralong, Yandeyarra, Newman and Jigalong where it was shared with the people who contributed their stories to it," says Ms Anderson.

"They had the opportunity to share it with their friends and family—and they in turn added to the exhibition through photographic workshops in school playgrounds, language centres and mine sites."

The museum's Advisory Council Chairman William McInnes joined the Pilbara tour at Yandeyarra and says he was humbled by the experience.



"Two kids showed me around their school, showed me the beautiful work they had created in the art room. Intricate linocuts, the young girl had made a delicate rose and the boy a snapper.

"For a person who spent most of his early schooling years out on the veranda—unfortunately there are too many such notices on my school report cards from Humpybong Infants—schoolrooms are nearly always places that I find inspiring. Simply because of the palatable sense of opportunity and possibility, of what those students may be capable of.

"Democracy is more than bellowing politicians and braying commentators. In part it's this exhibition. It's the work of the staff of the school. Graham the headmaster who walks the ground with respect for

the students and has respect so palpably returned, teachers like Nicole from Victoria who shyly says opportunity for all isn't a cliché if you believe it. It's the possibility of those students, the beauty of their work," says Mr McInnes.

To view the *Marnti warajanga—a walk together* exhibition and read the travelling exhibition's community blogs visit: www.moadoph.gov.au/exhibitions/online/marnti-warajanga

"Democracy is more than bellowing politicians and braying commentators."

Museum of Australian Democracy Advisory Council Chairperson William McInnes serves up dinner at Yandeyarra. Photo Tobias Titz. Courtesy Museum of Australian Democracy.

The 2012 Perth and Pilbara tour of *Marnti warajanga—a walk together* was supported by BHP Billiton and the Australian Government through its National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach (NCITO) Program. NCITO is an Australian Government initiative to improve access to the national collections for all Australians.

Contact the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House if you would like to host the *Marnti warajanga—a walk together* travelling exhibition.

Queensland Reds dare to lead

Queensland Rugby Union Ltd has kicked a huge reconciliation goal by becoming the first Rugby Union team to sign up to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program.

Queensland Rugby CEO Jim Carmichael says they, "have the opportunity to create and sustain social legacy through the development and execution of Queensland Rugby's Reconciliation Action Plan".

Considering the work that the Queensland Reds have already been doing in the Queensland community he went on to say, "we possess the experience and infrastructure to control its objectives and outcomes effectively".

There are 35 young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are already placed in work through the Queensland Reds joint employment program with Mission Australia.

The program understands one of the core links of reconciliation and the effectiveness of RAPs in that relationships and respect are what lead to opportunities.

Throughout the 18 month program, participants receive targeted assistance to develop the skills and confidence they need to secure rewarding employment opportunities that will set them on the right path to a brighter future.

The participants also receive ongoing support once they start work, ensuring they continue to succeed in their new job and meet the needs of their employer.

Clearly, given the outstanding work the Reds are already doing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we envisage that with the development of their RAP

they will continue to be trailblazers in the reconciliation movement.

Mr Carmichael also realises they have an important challenge ahead of them. "We understand that the process of reconciliation is a journey, and through our game Queensland Rugby Union is committed to taking bold and creative steps to empower Indigenous people."

"We are committed to making a positive difference through reinforcing messages of education and wellbeing," Mr Carmichael says.

Queensland Rugby has committed to have their RAP developed by March 2013.

Queensland Reds captain Will Genia leads his team on the field for the first Indigenous Round against the Highlanders. Photo courtesy Queensland Rugby Union.



Faith in reconciliation

by Archdeacon Karen Kime



Photo by Lindi Heap.

To be made the first Aboriginal female Archdeacon was a great privilege yet was something I had not planned. The saying 'in God's good time' was certainly true for me, as I find myself in a position to be more effective to enable change than ever before. Indeed, it seems that all of my working life has been about reconciliation.



My childhood was spent in Cabramatta in the western suburbs of Sydney. This was a truly amazing place to grow up, as we witnessed first a vibrant Italian community, soon followed by the Vietnamese refugees as they risked everything in the hope of a better future. Throughout this time, I was raised within a large extended family. Cared for by my grandmother (a Biripa woman) I learnt the meaning of struggle in the midst of poverty and the great love that she had for 'country'. At the age of eight she was sent out to work as a domestic, so the Welfare Protection Board would not take her away. She and my grandfather, left their beloved homelands in the 1920's searching for greater anonymity as they began to have a family. When they settled in the inner suburbs of Sydney, they became active for better rights for our people and established the first Koori Dances at Camperdown.

My mother is also a strong woman, who in the 1960's worked in the area of transport. In those days, working outside the home was discouraged for women, but to work in such a male-dominated industry was challenging. Her job was to deliver new cars to the buyers and more than a couple of times I remember her being taken to Newtown Police Station and placed in temporary custody. The police always suspected her of stealing the cars. In those days Aboriginal people did not own property like other Australians. As parents, they also could not be the legal guardians for their children. This law in particular, impacted heavily on my family. Yet despite many hardships, she graduated with her first degree at the age of 60!

Although I left school at 14, education became incredibly important to me, as I began to realise its ability to change the course of one's life. It wasn't until I attended university that I learnt about activism and became involved in pushing for human rights. At the local level, older Wiradjuri women

were my mentors and shared their wisdom generously. Such women were 'ground breakers' and had spent their lives fighting for much needed services with their people. They were also my teachers and my inspiration.

My early days of community work left images in my mind that made me passionate about helping to create a better future. Situations such as visiting the frail and elderly in town camps—without running water; working within a prison when a 'death in custody' occurred; seeing the impact of racism on the young; marching down the streets of Sydney in the Bicentenary with the rest of our people; being present when Kevin Rudd made the historic Apology are just a few of the images that 'keep the fire burning'.

"As a lecturer, sharing the journey and watching Aboriginal students grow was indeed a great privilege."

During the 1990's I was in a position within Charles Sturt University where I could push for change in areas such as primary school teaching and social work. (We were amongst the first to pilot such training in these areas.) It became compulsory for students of primary teaching to undertake training in Aboriginal studies to teach Aboriginal kids effectively. I also felt driven to enabling access to education for Indigenous Australians and wanted to do this, anyway that I could. As a lecturer, sharing the journey and watching Aboriginal students grow was indeed a great privilege.



Importantly, faith cannot exist without action; without responding to the need that surrounds you. We find this within the scriptures and we also find this within Aboriginal lore. It is within our Dreaming and our stories where the meaning of 'the common good' is made abundantly clear. Thus, when we find ourselves in a position of privilege, I believe that we have the responsibility to work with those around us; to broaden the horizons of our people.

Living and working along the banks of the Murrumbidgee River is a great pleasure for me. Country helps to make us strong, and it was precisely time spent along this very special place, where I felt my calling to ministry. (Wiradjuri people are 'river people' with four major rivers flowing through their country. Like many other nations, water has always been seen as 'sacred'.) The Spirit communicates with us in many ways, but I think for our people we are more able to respond when immersed in His creation. Spending time and 'being grounded' has always been vital for our health, resilience and maintaining a sense of balance.

Entering the Church has been the biggest, yet most rewarding challenge of my life. People often expect it to be 'warm and welcoming' and different to other organisations, however that is sometimes not the case. Across the world, the ministry of women has traditionally been discouraged. It is within such an arena that I began my ministry. Because I was both black and a woman, I was a target for many. Consequently, the first years as a priest were the most difficult working

"It is within our Dreaming and our stories where the meaning of 'the common good' is made abundantly clear."

Archdeacon Karen Kime with Aunty Matilda House and Reverend Tim Costello at the Faith in Reconciliation public lecture in Canberra. Photo courtesy Lindi Heap.

years of my life, yet I was determined to succeed. Interestingly, I believe that such struggle can serve to make us stronger. As Archdeacon, I am now in a position to make significant changes within the church, creating access for employment into leadership positions for Indigenous Australians, while changing the mono culture of the organisation. It is slowly becoming a welcoming place for our people.

I believe that reconciliation is everyone's business. As Archdeacon, we have created some wonderful partnerships with Aboriginal communities across NSW with the aim of contributing to the capacity and resilience of those places. Reconciliation is also about sharing; the sharing of stories and the creation of a better future for all Australians.

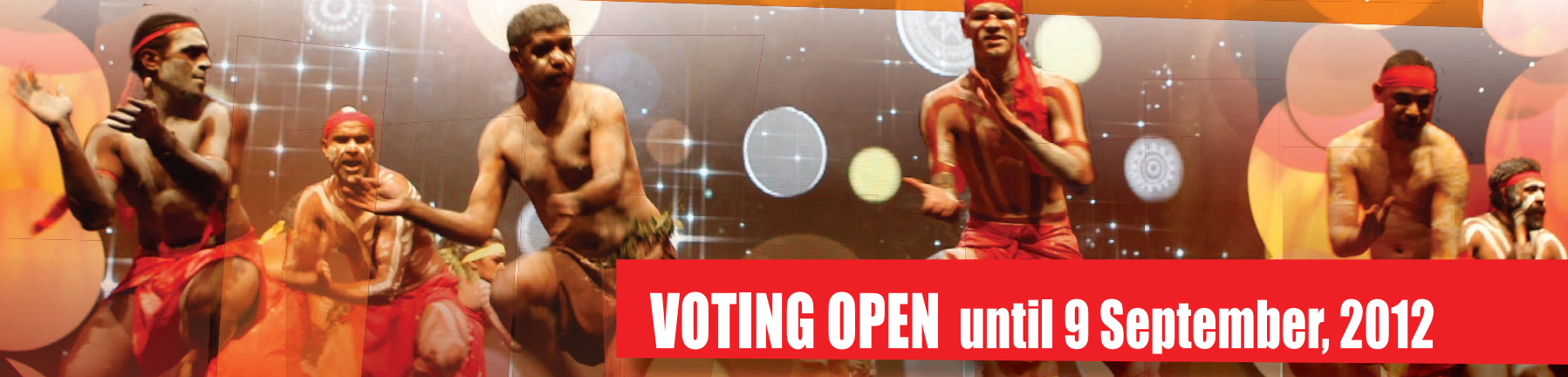
DEADLY
VIBE group



THE 2012 DEADLYS

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER, MUSIC, SPORT, ENTERTAINMENT & COMMUNITY AWARDS

Sydney Opera House, 8pm, Tuesday, 25 September, 2012



VOTING OPEN until 9 September, 2012

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THE DEADLY'S - RECOGNISING THE CONTRIBUTION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS TO THEIR COMMUNITY AND TO AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY; SHOWCASING OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT AND PROVIDING ROLE MODELS TO INSPIRE ALL, PARTICULARLY OUR YOUNG PEOPLE.

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SPORT



ARTS



HALL OF FAME

COMMUNITY



Leadership

MUSIC



Australia's first Indigenous opera heads west

Rachael Woods, as Gomuka, in the prelude of *Pecan Summer* by Deborah Cheetham.
Photo by Jorge de Araujo.



A “remarkable achievement”, “stunning voices”, “extraordinary performances”; these are just a few of the descriptions of Australia’s first Indigenous opera, *Pecan Summer*. The cast and crew are now taking *Pecan Summer* to the West and are currently in rehearsals for their Perth season this September. Shannan Dodson talks to Deborah Cheetham about the production and what reconciliation means to her.

The opera tells the story of the 1939 walk-off of 200 Yorta Yorta men, women and children from the Cummeragunja mission in southern New South Wales, across the Murray River into Victoria.

The dramatic performance powerfully conveys a story of dispossession and an unending quest for belonging.

When it premiered in Mooroopna, in Victoria’s north last year, the sell-out show received a standing ovation for 15 minutes. Tears were shed as the audience followed a story that has resonance with many Aboriginal families affected by past policies, when children were stolen from their families.

The opera echoes the experience of the creator Yorta Yorta woman Deborah Cheetham; the amazing talent behind this ground-breaking piece. A member of the stolen generation, she was taken from her family when she was just three weeks old.

Deborah Cheetham is a classically trained musician who gained her degree at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. She wanted to write a piece that would encourage other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander singers to consider a career in the world of opera. In doing that, she would get to share the stage with other Indigenous Australian singers.

Being awarded a prestigious two-year fellowship from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, is what led Deborah to create Australia’s first Indigenous opera.

Travelling the country, she went in search to find, audition and teach 15 Aboriginal singers, as well as this wrote and composed her first opera.

While researching the story, Deborah discovered her own Aboriginal grandparents, James and Sissy Little, whom she never knew, were at Cummeragunja.

Finding out this remarkable link had a profound effect on her. Through her research for *Pecan Summer*, she made a connection to her family and broader community.

“It really helped me to develop a full understanding of myself, and find a belonging, and it’s been a really important and personal journey.”

Though told in a different timeframe; Cheetham has employed her own experiences in writing scenes throughout the opera.

“It’s heavily drawn on the experiences of my mother Monica, and her attempts to get me back after I’d been taken from her.”

In writing this story it is clear, in Deborah’s words that, “the truth is always stronger than fiction”.

Themes of reconciliation also resonate throughout the opera, particularly in the end scene. Six months into writing the opera, she did not have the end written, and was not sure how she wanted to finish it.

“Reconciliation is a positive activity; a positive measure that we can take together, that makes us a stronger nation.”

She describes standing in Federation Square watching Kevin Rudd’s Apology to the Stolen Generations, and realising that this had to form the final act of *Pecan Summer*.

For Deborah, the Apology was a way to round off this story and to convey that this was a beginning not an ending; it opened up the door for what we can do together for reconciliation.

The success of the opera has led Deborah to create *Short Black Opera*; a national

not-for-profit opera company devoted to the development of Indigenous opera singers.

In describing the work the company does, it is safe to say she is not short of things to do. An interesting project the company conducts is workshops with community and rural choirs which teaches them the final act of *Pecan Summer*; with the excerpt of the Apology speech threaded through.

Cheetham feels this is reconciliation at its grassroots level; as it starts a conversation. She feels it gives people the tools to understand what reconciliation means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and what it can mean for themselves.

Through these conversations she would love people to understand there is “nothing to lose from embracing Aboriginal culture” that in the words of Paul Keating, “there is everything to gain”.

Earlier this year Deborah teamed up with didgeridoo player William Barton and the Monash University’s Academy Orchestra for a special National Reconciliation Week performance at Melbourne Town Hall.

In describing reconciliation she considers it, “a way of living; it’s an empowering frame of mind that all Australian’s can enter into, and more Australians are entering into”.

“It is about all Australians understanding the true value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.”

Further she insists that “when we enter into that relationship, that understanding” of reconciliation that is when we realise that we in fact have a “shared journey”.

“I see reconciliation moving forward, and to be led by the people. Reconciliation is a positive activity; a positive measure that we can take together, that makes us a stronger nation.”

Pecan Summer will have its third season in Perth at the Heath Ledger Theatre September 6, 7 and 8. Bookings can be made at www.bocsticketing.com.au

Snapshot: National Reconciliation Week 2012



Reconciliation Australia Co-Chair Melinda Cilento with Arilla Consulting Managing Director Shelley Reys and KPMG's Martin Blake celebrate National Reconciliation Week in Sydney

"It's important not to gloss over the sad things in our history...we should be big and brave about those things" Koori

Mail Editor Kirstie Parker on Channel 7's Weekend Sunrise

"Having finally recognised what footy can do for our Indigenous brothers and sisters let's harness the connection for all it's worth" Essendon FC Chairman

David Evans

"I hope people look at Busby and myself and see us as living proof of reconciliation" Jeremy Marou
(one half of the band Busby Marou)

"As Australia's largest private employer of Indigenous people we support National Reconciliation Week"

RioTinto



Reconciliation Queensland's Kirsten Arbuckle with a Walgurukaba Walkabout dancer at the Townsville Reconciliation Festival



Steven Brereton at the opening of the Nawi Conference at the Australian National Maritime Museum

"We need to unite as a people" Gail Mabo

"Being Australian is about being inclusive and accepting" David Koch

"We all have an active part to play in making the change" Comedian Kevin Kropinyeri



Reconciliation Australia Co-Chair Dr Tom Calma at Canberra's National Sorry Day walk



Toriann DeBosch at the inaugural National Indigenous Youth Parliament

"Reconciliation is about all Australians working together and training, living, achieving together"

Robert de Castella

"History matters and we must learn from the past"

Melinda Cilento, RA Co-Chair at the KPMG Inspirational Women's event in Sydney

"Reconciliation is about everyone working together to make Australia a unique and harmonious place"

NRW Ambassador Mark Olive



Qantas staff at the launch of their RAP launch during National Reconciliation Week

Calling all future leaders

The Jobs Australia Foundation is once again offering a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to 24 emerging Indigenous leaders between the ages of 18 to 25, and eight Indigenous mentors aged 30 and over.

The program will run from January 2013 to November 2014, and is open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from anywhere in Australia.

Applicants should be highly motivated, passionate about strengthening and developing their leadership skills, and capable of meeting deadlines and working in a team. Above all, they must aspire to future leadership roles in their communities and beyond.

They are looking for people who:

- can demonstrate a commitment to leadership, whether in their family, community, school or workplace;
- can commit to a total of 37 days of residential training over two years, which includes a five-day cultural affirmation walk in remote Western Australia, and a trek of the Kokoda Track; and
- are keen to take part in an inspiring and transformational Indigenous leadership program.

All participants who complete the program earn a qualification that recognises their effort and contribution and the skills they have acquired over the life of the program.

For more information:

www.jafoundation.com.au or call Jodie Belyea on 03 9349 3699. Applications close Friday 31 August 2012.



Telstra talks recognition

Telstra has become one of the first corporate companies in Australia to formally recognise traditional owners by installing signs of acknowledgment in every branded Telstra store and business centre across Australia.

Telstra's Chief Customer Officer, Gordon Ballantyne, said Telstra has a long and proud commitment to Indigenous Australia, and acknowledging the Traditional Owners of where Telstra branded stores are located is an important part of supporting reconciliation.

"We're proud to introduce this official acknowledgement into our stores as a small but genuine sign of our commitment to recognition and reconciliation," Mr Ballantyne said.

"Telstra's wide-reaching national presence means we are well placed to provide opportunities for Indigenous Australians and we firmly believe that by promoting diversity and inclusion, we enhance the communities we live and work in.

"Through Telstra's Reconciliation Action Plan, we're focused on providing access to communications, employment opportunities, and support for education, the arts, and culture to help secure a brighter future for Indigenous Australians."

The acknowledgement sign will be placed on the door of each of Telstra's 350 branded stores and 90 business centres across Australia. It will display Telstra's acknowledgement statement, as well as the artwork created by Riki Salam, Creative Director of Indigenous design agency, Gilimbaa.

The artwork was originally created for Telstra's first Reconciliation Action Plan in 2010.

Mr Salam said Gilimbaa were impressed by Telstra's commitment to Indigenous Australians.

"This is a really exciting project, as Telstra is a national corporate organisation and it is acknowledging, in every one of its stores, the important place of Indigenous culture within Australian society," Mr Salam said.

"By Telstra using their Reconciliation Action Plan artwork as an Acknowledgment of Country it brings a greater presence and understanding of Indigenous culture to our everyday lives, which is where it belongs."

Who do you admire?

The search is on to find the next Australian of the Year, Senior Australian, Young Australian and Australia's Local Hero in the Australian of the Year Awards 2013. If you know someone who deserves to be recognised for their leadership, dedication or generosity now is the time to nominate and make sure they are in the running.

Over the years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have featured strongly in the Australian of the Year Awards, most recently when 91-year-old Laurie Baymarrwangga was honoured as Senior Australian of the Year 2012. Laurie's extraordinary leadership and her courage in caring for the cultural and biological integrity of the Crocodile Islands is a wonderful story of perseverance by a devoted Australian.

Previous Aboriginal Australians of the Year include Professor Mick Dodson, Cathy Freeman, Neville Bonner, Mandawuy Yunupingu, Lowitja O'Donoghue and Lionel Rose. Each richly deserved their award but of course could not have been chosen had they not been nominated.

Chair of the National Australia Day Council, Adam Gilchrist, says that every Australian has a say in who should be considered for an award.

"Don't leave it to someone else. If there's someone in your family, or someone you know, or someone you admire who inspires you, then tell us about them."

Nominations can be made online at www.australianoftheyear.org.au or you can pick up a nomination form from any branch of major sponsor the Commonwealth Bank.

For more information call 1300 655 193.

Nominations close on Friday, 31 August 2012.



**JOIN THE MOVEMENT
TO HAVE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER PEOPLE RECOGNISED
IN THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION.**



Sign up and show your support.
www.youmeunity.org.au

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Equality and Recognition