



NARRAGUNNAWALI AWARDS 2025



Narragunnawali
Reconciliation in Education

NAKRA
GUNNA
WALI



TEACHERS
HEALTH 
We're for teachers

Acknowledgements

Reconciliation Australia, BHP Foundation, Telstra, Teachers Health, would like to acknowledge all applicants in the Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Education Awards 2025.

We thank participants for the time and dedication invested in their applications, reflecting the outstanding work being done to champion reconciliation in their learning communities. We particularly commend this year's finalists, who went to great lengths to present their programs and initiatives to the judging panel.

The awards judging panel is made up of eminent First Nations educationalists – Mx Sharon Davis (Chair), Professor Grace Sarra, and Professor Joe Sambono – who have been essential to the success of the awards. Each judge dedicated significant time and effort to the rigorous judging process, and we thank you.

We also extend our thanks to patrons Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and Professor Peter Buckskin for their ongoing support for the Narragunnawali Awards.

A special thank you to Wirrim Media for capturing the stories of finalists through photography and videography; to Aboriginal Steel Art who crafted the trophies; to Print Junction who printed the awards certificates and other event materials; to Wamburang Women's Choir and Jerikye Williams for helping us celebrate the winners and finalists with their performances at the awards event; and to Uncle Warren Daley of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council for welcoming us to Ngunnawal Country. We also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Countries we have visited throughout the awards process.

Reconciliation Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Patrons and Judges

PATRONS



Aunty Geraldine Atkinson
Patron



Professor Peter Buckskin
Patron

JUDGING PANEL



Mx Sharon Davis
Chair



Professor Joe Sambono
Judge



Professor Grace Sarra
Judge

Scan the code to learn more about the Narragunnawali Awards 2025 patrons and judging panel.



Message from Reconciliation Australia



CEO Karen Mundine. Photo: Joseph Mayers

As we celebrate the fifth Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Education Awards, I am once again energised and inspired by the outstanding work taking place across schools and early learning services to embed reconciliation into education practice.

For a decade, the Narragunnawali program has provided tools and resources to help educators take meaningful action towards reconciliation. Today, more than half of all Australian schools and early learning services have registered to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and hundreds have taken part in this unique national awards program that recognises outstanding reconciliation initiatives.

As I read the stories of this year's finalists in this booklet, what stands out for me is their exemplary commitment to truth-telling, cultural learning, relationship-building, and a whole-of-school or service approach to reconciliation. Their work spans embedding local First Nations languages, histories, and cultures into classroom practice; building respectful partnerships with Elders and communities and addressing racism and inequity.

These finalists are charting new pathways, showing that reconciliation is not just an idea but a lived practice. Their achievements raise expectations not only within education but across all sectors.

To every teacher, educator, staff member, student, Elder, and community member, we had the privilege of meeting, thank you. Your leadership brings the spirit of Narragunnawali to life and moves us closer to a more just, honest, and reconciled Australia.

Karen Mundine,
Chief Executive Officer,
Reconciliation Australia

Bannister Creek Primary School

SCHOOLS CATEGORY

Bannister Creek Primary School, situated on Whadjuk Noongar Country in Perth (Boorloo), embeds reconciliation into everyday learning. Guided by its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), co-developed with Aboriginal families, the school fosters cultural safety, equity, and respectful relationships across its community.

The *Cultural Inclusive Committee* is central in embedding truth-telling and Noongar language across the curriculum, ensuring Aboriginal perspectives are visible and valued. This commitment is reflected in the *Kulunga Kaatitjin* (child's knowledge) strategy, which supports culturally responsive teaching through regular student-teacher conversations that affirm identity and belonging.

Learning programs celebrate culture and Country. All students engage in STEM and environmental projects informed by Aboriginal ecological knowledge and the six Noongar seasons, deepening their understanding of interconnectedness and sustainability. The *Baronga (yaakan)* project empowers Year 5 and 6 students to lead care for Country activities and share their insights with peers.

Aboriginal Student Leaders are elected by classmates to support cultural programs and help coordinate commemorative events through *Koorlangka Birdiya* (the kid's bridge). This initiative fosters leadership and cultural pride across the school.

Staff are committed to ongoing professional learning in truth-telling, anti-racism, decolonisation, and on-Country experiences with Elders, ensuring reconciliation is not a moment, but an ongoing journey.



Aboriginal Islander Education Officer Wayne McNamara and Principal Susan Archdall from Bannister Creek Primary School. Photo: Tom Hoy, Wirrim Media

Briar Road Public School

SCHOOLS CATEGORY

Located on Dharawal Country in Sydney's southwest, Briar Road Public School maintains a long-standing vision for reconciliation built on respect, cultural safety and strong relationships with local First Nations Elders and community.

Guided by this vision, the school collaborates with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to co-design transition programs that ensure First Nations children and families feel safe and supported when starting school.

Its contribution to developing the *NSW Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care* reflects the school's commitment to system-wide change. Through its *Cultural Immersion Program* – now in its eighth year – Briar Road deepens understanding of Country and culture among staff and educators from other schools.

The school also hosts mentoring visits, sharing practices to support reconciliation in other communities.

Aboriginal families are active in decision-making through regular meetings, ensuring reconciliation is ongoing, collaborative, and based on mutual respect. First Nations staff lead cultural education, supported by Aboriginal and non-Indigenous colleagues, building confidence and reducing cultural load.

This approach has fostered a strong sense of belonging and cultural pride for First Nations staff and students while supporting non-Indigenous staff and families to advance reconciliation at home, school and in the community.

Briar Road Public School was also a Narragunnawali Awards 2021 finalist.

Karuah Public School

SCHOOLS CATEGORY

Located on Worimi Country on the NSW Mid North Coast, Karuah Public School's vision for reconciliation is grounded in truth-telling, healing and unity.

For more than 30 years, Aboriginal children were denied entry to Karuah Public School – from 1916 to 1954 – under the government policy of *Exclusion on Demand*. Karuah Public School is committed to acknowledging the trauma and rebuilding trust through honesty and visible change. Elders share their experiences of exclusion as part of the school's truth-telling initiatives, allowing for a recognition of this painful period while fostering understanding among students and staff.

This commitment is also expressed through symbolic acts, such as removing a perimeter fence and creating a pathway of painted footsteps tracing the community's journey from exclusion to unity.

Weekly Gathang language lessons and cultural lessons led by Elders connect students with local knowledge and have contributed to significant academic gains in literacy and numeracy for all students.

Reconciliation at Karuah Public School is also actioned through annual Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) conducted at the Karuah Mission with parents – shifting the power dynamics – along with prioritising employment opportunities for Aboriginal community members.

Five years of dialogue, shared purpose, and respect have helped transform a once-divided community into one walking forward together.



Assistant Principal Jessica Scott and Aboriginal Curriculum Culture Teacher Jason Sampson from Briar Road Public School sharing their reconciliation journey. Photo: Tom Hoy, Wirrim Media



L to R: Narragunnawali Awards 2025 judge Professor Grace Sarra, Karuah Public School Principal Toni Lyle, Community Member, Worimi, Biripi & Wiradjuri Woman Aunty Michelle Perry, and Narragunnawali Awards 2025 judge Professor Joe Sambono Photo: Tom Hoy, Wirrim Media

Evans Head-Woodburn Preschool

EARLY LEARNING CATEGORY

Evans Head-Woodburn Preschool, located on Bandjalang Country on the NSW Far North Coast, nurtures a learning environment where reconciliation, respect and cultural inclusion are woven into every aspect of early education.

Guided by Bandjalang Elders and Traditional Owners, the preschool builds strong, long-lasting relationships with local Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal educators work alongside non-Indigenous educators leading programs that centre First Nations self-determination, truth-telling and cultural knowledge, while Bandjalang Elder-in-Residence, Aunty Simone, shares language, stories, and history, fostering intergenerational learning.

The long-running *Cousin Program* connects preschoolers with Aboriginal students in Year 5, fostering leadership, connection and cultural pride.

Educators strengthen their practice through initiatives like *Stronger Smarter Jarjums* and regular knowledge sharing sessions that, paired with the preschool's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Policy*, also work to address cultural load on First Nations staff. Bandjalang language and culture are embedded throughout the curriculum – from murals to yarning circles to the *Boogal Jagoon* nature classroom, where children learn to care for Country and explore Aboriginal knowledge systems.

Aboriginal representation on the preschool's management committee ensures decision-making reflects community voices.

As part of the *Northern Rivers Preschool Alliance*, the service also supports others in developing RAPs, extending its commitment to reconciliation beyond its own gates.



L-R: Co-Director Michelle Stanley-Jones, Director Cath Gillespie and Educational Leader and Cultural Advisor Kirby Slade from Evans Head-Woodburn Preschool. Photo: Tom Hoy, Wirrim Media

Goodstart Shailer Park

EARLY LEARNING CATEGORY

Goodstart Shailer Park, located on the Country of the Jagera and Yugambah speaking people in Logan (Meanjin/ Brisbane), has a decade-long history of strong reconciliation efforts.

Its vision is for an education system where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and continuing contributions are taught authentically, and where children, educators, and families learn respect for First Nations peoples across all settings.

Guided by this vision, the service partners closely with local Aboriginal education organisation, Gunya Meta, and local Elder Uncle Barry, to embed First Nations perspectives into daily practice through its long-standing Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

First Nations families are consulted regularly to ensure cultural safety and inclusion, strengthening relationships across the community. Its *Yarns for Jarjums* forum creates space for Elders, educators and community members to share knowledge and foster understanding. Since 2018, Goodstart Shailer Park has helped organise local NAIDOC celebrations, growing from 200 participants to 2,000 in 2025, reflecting their commitment to supporting reconciliation in and outside of the centre.

RAP actions are embedded into team Performance and Engagement Plans (PEPs), ensuring personal accountability and growth that is tied to the service's overall vision. Goodstart Shailer Park also prioritises employing First Nations educators, helping create a culturally safe, inclusive, and forward-looking learning community.



L-R: Narragunnawali Awards 2025 judging panel chair Sharon Davis with Educators Jo Steinheuer and Ella Morgan and Centre Director Kristy Morgan from Goodstart Early Learning Centre Shailer Park. Photo: Tom Hoy, Wirrim Media

Tillys Play and Development Centre – Rutherford

EARLY LEARNING CATEGORY

Tillys Play and Development Centre – Rutherford, located on Wonnarua Country in Maitland, NSW, is guided by a reconciliation vision to create a culturally safe and inclusive environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' identities are respected and visible throughout the service.

This vision is realised through a whole centre approach to meaningfully embedding First Nations peoples' perspectives into programs, with the support of families, local First Nations Elders and the wider community. Staff work closely with the Early Childhood Engagement Officer for the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) who provide guidance on resources and learning experiences and developing and maintaining relationships both within the Tillys community and wider community.

The centre's *Cultural Squad* leads projects such as the *Bush Tucker Garden* that nurtures learning on Country.

Local Aboriginal artist Jessica Hopcroft (Dhiyaan Art) designs feature on the service's logo and uniforms, and a signed community *Cultural Safety Net* and framed Acknowledgement of Country welcomes all families to the site, ensuring culture is visibly embedded in everyday spaces.

Educators engage in professional development through the *Indigenous Services Group*, critical reflection forums, webinars, and training aligned with their Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to embed reconciliation in practice.



Educator Hayley helps children learn through play that celebrates culture, connection and belonging. Photo: Tom Hoy, Wirrim Media

Sponsors



Teachers Health, Schools Category Sponsor

'As we continue on our Innovate RAP journey, we understand the importance and value of the Narragunnawali program and we're proud to sponsor the 2025 Awards, recognising and championing schools that are walking the path of reconciliation with purpose and heart.'

- Brad Joyce, CEO and RAP Champion of the Teachers Health Group



Telstra, Early Learning Category Sponsor

'We're honoured to sponsor the 2025 Narragunnawali Awards and celebrate the incredible work educators are doing to lead reconciliation in Australia. By supporting the younger generation to be the change we want to see, we're hoping to shape a future where reconciliation is understood and lived from the very beginning.'

- Lauren Ganley, Telstra's Chief First Nations Advocate



BHP Foundation, Program Sponsor

'Education has the power to shape a more equitable and sustainable future. The Narragunnawali program drives meaningful change through education and collective action, nurturing generations who respect and celebrate First Nations cultures. BHP Foundation proudly supports Reconciliation Australia's vital work in building a more unified Australia.'

- Victoria Thom, BHP Foundation Country Director - Australia

Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Education Awards 2025

EVENT PROGRAM

MC

Shelley Ware

Welcome to Country

Uncle Warren Daley, United Ngunnawal Elders Council

Welcome from Reconciliation Australia

Kirstie Parker, Reconciliation Australia Co-Chair

Musical Performance

Wamburang Women's Choir

Narragunnawali Awards 2025 Chair Address and Presentation of Schools Award

Sharon Davis

Schools Category Finalists

Bannister Creek Primary School, Whadjuk Noongar Country, WA

Briar Road Public School, Dharawal Country, NSW

Karuah Public School, Worimi Country, NSW

Presentation of Early Learning Award

Professor Grace Sarra

Early Learning Category Finalists

Evans Head – Woodburn Preschool, Bandjalang Country, NSW

Goodstart Shailer Park, Country of the Jagera and Yugambah speaking people, Qld

Tillys Play and Development Centre – Rutherford, Wonnarua Country, NSW

Networking and event conclusion

Live music by Jerikye Williams

