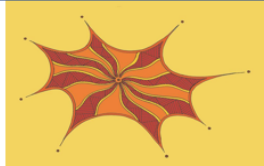


Learning Circle

Cultural Safety in Local Government | 27 July 2018

Summary

Reconciliation Victoria acknowledges we met on the lands of the Wurundjeri people and paid our respect to elders past and present



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What we learned

"The cultural load carried by Aboriginal staff is real"

Jo Atkinson, Koorie Magistrates Court

Background

This Learning Circle event was organised by Reconciliation Victoria with funding support from Reconciliation Australia and was attended by 45 staff working across 16 Local Governments in Victoria. It was held at the Aborigines Advancement League in Thornbury, the oldest Aboriginal organisation in Victoria, and a very culturally significant gathering place for Aboriginal people.

Learning circle theme

The theme of **cultural safety** arose out of conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in local government about challenges they faced, including often feeling isolated and having huge expectations placed on them from within and outside their workplaces. We were also aware of the [From Symbols to Systems](#) cultural safety framework which has been developed by the Inner-North West Primary Care Partnership and we knew this valuable resource was easily transferable and relevant to Local Governments.

The *From Symbols to Systems* framework was developed for use in the community services sector by the Inner-North West Primary Care Partnership who won a 2018 HART Award.

Agenda

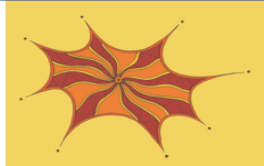
Morning	Post Lunch	Afternoon
<p>Traditional owner acknowledgment</p> <p>Yarning Session: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander council staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Sharing experiences working in council.Perspectives on cultural safety.Developing guiding principles for your workplace to adopt.	<p>All Local Government staff welcomed.</p> <p><i>What is cultural safety?</i></p> <p>Guest speakers: From Symbols to Systems, <i>Inner North-West Primary Care Partnership</i></p> <p>Liz Phillips, Jo Atkinson, Paula Stewart, Emma Fitzsimon</p>	<p>Group discussion/activities: What is the Cultural Safety pyramid? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker suggestions for moving up the pyramid and what guiding principles should be adopted?</p> <p>Panel Discussion: Listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices on cultural safety in council.</p>

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Key messages

What is Cultural Safety?

Cultural Safety recognises that everyone has a right to be different and that society should ensure its institutions, including workplaces, are not dominated by any one cultural perspective. Practicing cultural safety and 'naming' culture attempts to ensure no section of society is deliberately marginalised or disadvantaged.

Cultural Safety Pyramid:

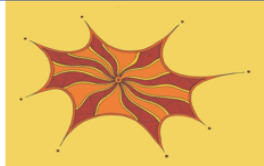


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Recommendations for what cultural safety should look like in the workplace:

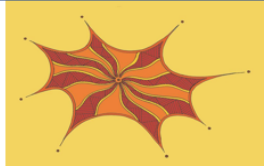
- **Policies** are in place and being practiced and supported by Managers.
- Successful **RAP endorsed** by Reconciliation Australia and RAP priorities are everyone's business.
- Good **relationships and partnerships** with Aboriginal Community.
- Organisation has a good level of '**champions**' committed to Cultural Safety.
- **Aboriginal recruitment** – strategy in place, identified positions, goals and target set, workers feel united/supported.
- **Cultural leave** is not just on paper, it's practiced and understood by Council, without fear.
- Specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **Cultural Awareness Training**, Yarning Sessions, Learning Circles.
- Council initiates and attends **Aboriginal events** and includes Aboriginal community members in mainstream events.
- **Flags** are flying permanently
- Council has an active and engaged **Aboriginal Advisory Committee**
- Effective ongoing Aboriginal community **engagement and consultation**/Aboriginal voices drive Council decisions.
- Designated **cultural space**
- Dedicated **funding** for ongoing staff education and development
- **Cultural audits** are conducted by Aboriginal community partners/suppliers
- Increase of Aboriginal staff **recruitment**
- Use and engagement of **KEY Aboriginal Community Members**
- Understanding and acceptance of **Aboriginal culture** across the organisation
- Public acknowledgement of historical wrongs/impact of **colonisation**
- Council **contact staff** should be trained to create cultural safety for Aboriginal families
- **Early Years services** should all have Reconciliation Action Plans in place
- Greater promotion of *Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Action Plan*
- **Goals/Targets** linked to Aboriginal employment
- Improved Branding and Tagging/Traditional Owner Acknowledgement on 'all' staff emails
- Recording and tracking staff progress in **cultural training** - from awareness to safety.

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Recommended **guiding principles** for embedding cultural safety into your workplace:

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Aboriginal inclusion charter▪ Set principles – Self determination, Equity, Respect, Justice, Partnership.▪ RAP, Diversity team, Community Engagement▪ Aboriginal Employment Strategy▪ Protocol & Guidelines for Staff managing Aboriginal matters▪ Welcome to Country/Acknowledgment▪ Aboriginal Advisory Group▪ Internal working groups/Champions▪ Identified and designated positions▪ Flying Flags – community education campaigns▪ Cultural Awareness Training – specific▪ Staff Leave entitlements/Kinship ties understood▪ Respect Aboriginal cultural content/art, Intellectual property protection▪ Develop meaningful partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations and elders.▪ Recognise Council has a lot to learn still and embrace the journey.▪ Engage with your Aboriginal work force and understand your worker's needs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cultural awareness is compulsory for all staff and is a journey for all stages of cultural safety pyramid.▪ Display and promote Aboriginal artwork at Council and more broadly across municipality.▪ Conduct training around what the differences are between doing an Acknowledgement, Welcome and Smoking Ceremony.▪ Cultural naming of places in Municipality, including stories of place significance.▪ Be honest and transparent about not knowing Aboriginal cultural information or how to manage Aboriginal issues/affairs.▪ Ensure relevant Council staff are appropriately informed on issues of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Land Management.▪ Tangible and intangible heritage knowledge and education▪ Guidelines on appropriate communication and engagement with Aboriginal communities.▪ Cultural protocols established for working with Traditional Owners.▪ Review and reform Council laws and policies to account for cultural considerations and differences. |
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“One of the things that was so powerful about this Learning Circle was the concept of the ‘cultural load’ Aboriginal people carry around in the workplace, often invisible to their non-Aboriginal colleagues”.

“The expectation to be the go-to font of knowledge on everything Aboriginal, regardless of their job description, and also facing expectations from community on what they can and should do”.

“Aboriginal staff in Local Government seem to sometimes have to justify themselves and how they work to colleagues who don't understand or can't appreciate how community works”.

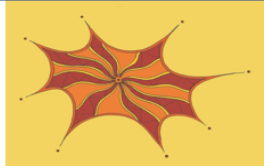
Erin McKinnon, State Coordinator,
Reconciliation Victoria

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Reconciliation Victoria thanks Sara Stuart and Dennis Batty of *Indigenous Employment Partners* for facilitating the day. Emma, Jo, Paula and Liz from INWPCP for presenting the story of *From Symbols to Systems* Framework. Donna Wright, Shona Stewart, Maria Dugan and William Glenbar who were part of our panel session. Reconciliation Australia for providing funding and Christine Dernee from RA for attending. Finally, we extend our gratitude to the Aborigines Advancement League for hosting and feeding us.

Reconciliation Victoria's work in Local Government space:

- [Maggolee](#) - a one-stop-shop for Victorian councils seeking information and advice on Aboriginal engagement and reconciliation.
- [HART Awards](#) [stories of the Local Government finalists provide much inspiration and ideas for action].
- [Surveyed](#) Victorian councils in 2012 on their activities in this area and Councils have used these results to support their planning and programming, looking at areas where they fell below the state average in their policies and practice.
- [Report](#) on the strengths and challenges of the Reconciliation Action Plan program for Victorian local councils.
- The [Victorian Aboriginal Local Government Action Plan](#) has many useful case-studies and ideas from councils across the State across the range of Council areas, and also a set of State-wide principles on pg.8 developed with significant Aboriginal input which are valuable.
- Please visit our [website](#) to learn more about what we do, sign-up to our monthly [eNews](#).

Please join us for another great learning circle soon!



From all the Rec Vic team.