



First Nations People and Place Strategy

July 2023 - June 2025

Uniting

Acknowledgement

Uniting NSW.ACT acknowledges Australia's First Peoples as the original and ongoing custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work.

We recognise the continuing sovereignty of First Peoples in NSW and the ACT, and their absolute right to self-determination.

We act on our responsibility to co-create a national dialogue of truth that proudly embraces First Peoples' history, culture, and rights, for present and future generations.

We pay our respects to all Elders – past, present, and emerging – and to all First Peoples and communities.



Commissioned artwork by Charmaine Mumbulla, a proud Kurna/Narungga woman from Point Pearce in South Australia, with family ties to the Gumbaynggirr people of the NSW Mid North Coast. It pays tribute to the diversity of Aboriginal lands and languages across NSW and the ACT, where Uniting supports people and communities with the delivery of vital services. The vibrant circle unites us across the 4 landscapes of desert, forest, coast and mountain, centred by a cross symbolising our work through Christ. A lilly pilly fruit blooms in the heart of the circle, representing nourishment and growth.

Artwork and illustrations in this document were created by, and chosen through consultation with, First Nations Peoples.

Statement of Commitment from the Uniting NSW.ACT Board and Executive Director

Uniting has a unique and significant role to play in partnering with First Nations communities to help them achieve meaningful change through self-determination.

As the community services and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, we acknowledge that this work takes place on land that always was and always will be Aboriginal land. With that comes great responsibility; a responsibility to truly listen and constantly reflect on how we can do better and, most importantly, to take action.

Our First Nations People and Place Strategy acknowledges the responsibility and opportunity Uniting has to disrupt the cycles of disadvantage and inter-generational trauma still experienced by First Nations people today. As a community services provider, an employer, and a partner, we are determined to walk alongside First Nations communities as our country overcomes systemic barriers and injustices so that all people can reach their full potential.

We commit our organisation to build shared understandings, relationships, and to work with First Nations communities towards changes at all levels – within our organisation, within the communities we serve and in state and national policies. We do so, on the foundation established by the Uniting Church in Australia's 1994 Covenanting Statement with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

We know that systemic change needs to start from within, and in making this commitment we also commit to transforming ourselves so that Uniting is a place where our First Nations clients and employees can reach their own goals within culturally safe services and workplaces. We know this is a long-term commitment and one that we must take seriously. So this commitment also comes with an investment in new senior First Nations leaders to guide the delivery of our strategy. We are also incredibly grateful to Uniting's Ngumbadal Network of First Nations employees who have shared their insights with us. This process of consultation is now firmly embedded in our strategy.

We will continue the momentum that has been building within Uniting and the Uniting Church for real, substantive change for First Nations people and communities. We look forward to partnering with our Aboriginal colleagues, clients, volunteers and communities to create a better future where all First Nations people are strong, thriving and self-determining.

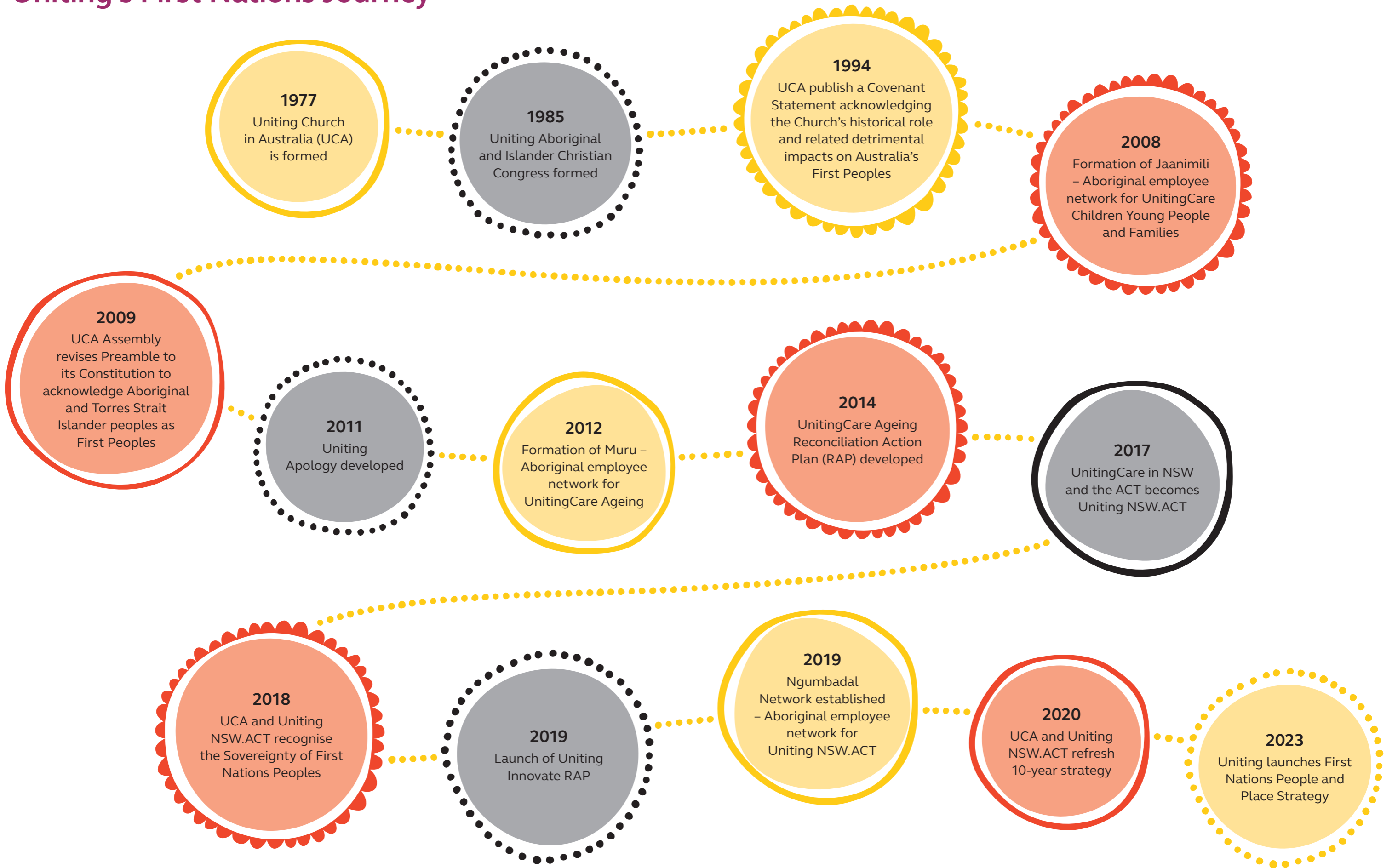
Heather Watson
Uniting Board
NSW.ACT Chair

Tracey Burton
Executive Director
Uniting NSW.ACT

Our commitment to covenanting

Uniting NSW.ACT is deeply committed to contributing to the work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) through moral leadership and diligent implementation of our First Nations People and Place Strategy. By building our relationships to support covenanting, we aim to work collaboratively with the Synod of NSW.ACT and the UAICC, to actively pursue reconciliation, unity, truth and justice.

Uniting's First Nations Journey



Context for a First Nations strategy

Why we need it

Our 10-year strategy sets a bold vision of **disrupting entrenched disadvantage**, so we must be **more ambitious** than ever for First Nations outcomes.

We know that requires a long-term commitment, a willingness to contribute to systemic change and, most of all, an unwavering commitment to self-determination woven across our broader organisational strategy.

Our ambition

First Nations people and communities are **strong, thriving and self-determining**.

Our commitment

In all areas of our work, Uniting is committed to partnering with First Nations people and communities to **enable self-determination and better outcomes** through mutual sharing of our knowledge, assets, resources and capability.

What we know we need to do better and differently

- We must be **accountable and truly share ownership** across Uniting to be impactful.
- We must **value and leverage the cultural expertise** of our First Nations colleagues and ensure their **VOICE is embedded** in all decision making.
- We must be **bold, testing and learning** from new ideas without fear of failure. We must **commit to scaling a few things** that work while decisively ending those that don't.
- We must take a long-term view and recognise all strategy pillars as interdependent, but **first prioritise employee and community engagement** as our foundation and biggest levers for change.

How this strategy was developed

A dedicated First Nations team developed this strategy through deep and wide consultation and dreaming. First Nations leaders and subject-matter experts beyond our organisation provided input to our ambitions and tactics alongside Uniting executives, the Ngumbadal Network and each directorate.

Uniting's First Nations People and Place Strategy

Our Strategy:



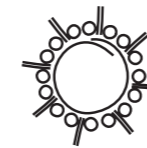
Our People

We will consciously grow our First Nations workforce and ensure our First Nations people are empowered to enrich their career experiences and capabilities.



Our Capability

We will invest in enhancing our cultural capabilities to be a culturally safe, responsive and empowering employer, partner and service provider.



Our Partners

We will purposefully invest in genuine and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal communities to promote and grow place-based and First-Nations-led responses.



Our Leadership

We are committed to strong governance including leadership practices to uphold our integrity and accountability to First Nations people and communities.



Our Impact

We will elevate the First Nations agenda and impact systems empowering First Nations people and communities through innovation, advocacy and research.

Our Ambition:





Our People

Why it's important:

Our own First Nations employees are one of Uniting's greatest assets. Their cultural and community knowledge is paramount to our vision and impact. Their wellbeing and cultural safety is critical.

Empowering First Nations people to achieve their community and professional aspirations is key to self-determination.

Our commitment:

We will consciously grow our First Nations workforce and ensure our First Nations people are empowered to enrich their career experiences and capabilities.

To succeed, we will focus on:

Increasing our workforce engagement, development and retention; growing our First Nations workforce; and recognising and celebrating the accomplishments of our First Nations workforce.

We are succeeding when:

We increase our engagement with First Nations employees through gatherings, networking and yarn-ups.
 First Nations employee engagement scores improve.
 We grow and retain our First Nations workforce, including at leadership levels.

Our strategy in action Ngumbadal Recognition Awards



The Ngumbadal Recognition Awards seek to pay tribute to network members at Uniting. This program not only acknowledges individuals who have successfully attained academic qualifications but also celebrates excellence in four distinct award categories.

Our Champion

Someone who stands up for our people, cultures, beliefs and values.

Our Trailblazer

Someone who explores and leads new possibilities and ways of working.

Our Collaborator

Someone who brings people together to unlock capabilities and achieve great outcomes.

The Hidden Gem

A quiet achiever who makes a difference by getting the job done.

"It was fulfilling reading all the nominations. Our people are amazing and I feel so privileged to work alongside them."

LIZ DUNSTONE, ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT MANAGER

"I was totally humbled to receive the award and to have that recognition from my peers. So many people are doing great work and these awards recognise those that are often the quiet achievers."

MARIE LANSDOWNE-BECK, AWARD RECIPIENT

Our Capability



Why it's important:

Improving our cultural intelligence at all levels is necessary for attracting and retaining First Nations employees, partnerships, culturally relevant services and delivering positive outcomes with First Nations people and communities.

First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing offer significant value to Uniting - they are at the heart of community and should be highly valued.

Our commitment:

We will invest in enhancing our cultural capabilities to be a culturally safe, responsive and empowering employer, partner and service provider.

To succeed, we will focus on:

Enhancing cultural capability; enhancing practice and service delivery; and improving systems, processes, policies and procedures.

We are succeeding when:

Uniting staff are self-directed in building their cultural capability and leveraging cultural knowledge and connections of their peers and communities.

First Nations people and communities tell us they are receiving appropriate services in a meaningful way through First Nations feedback mechanisms.

First Nations voices and input are embedded in policy and procedures.



Our strategy in action

Cultural capability journey: Uniting Communities South West Sydney

We recognise the importance of actively incorporating Aboriginal cultural competence and inclusive leadership into our business practices to ensure culturally inclusive services for all our clients. Our Communities South West Sydney team embarked on a bold learning journey, exploring ways to enhance the cultural safety, inclusion, and empowerment of their Aboriginal clients as our services were not being fully accessed by the First Nations community.

The team made it a priority to build relationships in their community and enhance team capability. They adopted a systemic approach, working closely with leaders and First Nations employees to gain insight into the work required.

A cultural transformation occurred as leaders came to recognise the significance of prioritising First Nations initiatives. This commitment was seamlessly integrated into their work, with dedicated time allocated to support these efforts.

They have actively sought to ensure Aboriginal clients have culturally inclusive experiences by enhancing the skills of their staff and aligning services accordingly. The team's journey of Aboriginal cultural capability building has focused on improving outcomes that align with several strategic objectives related to the First Nations People and Place Strategy.

By adopting a systemic change approach, they are working to disrupt entrenched disadvantage and demonstrating how our First Nations People and Place Strategy aspirations can create a better future for our people, communities, and regions in need.

"We wanted to get everyone involved so that Aboriginal business is everyone's business whether you're Aboriginal or not. Making it something that isn't just spoken about once a year, it is spoken about all the time. It's really empowering to see us being so genuinely supported and being able to evolve this."

LISA-MARIE TOWNSEND,
COMMUNITIES PRACTICE LEAD

"The true work of diversity, inclusion and reconciliation is all of us working together on it. It's not up to the Aboriginal staff to educate us and do all the work. It's thinking about all the parts that need to work together to make a change for the whole. When people work together and collaborate well, you can achieve great things."

LOUISE SMEATON, HEAD OF OPERATIONS
SOUTH WEST SYDNEY AND
ILLAWARRA, COMMUNITIES

Our Partners



Why it's important:

Genuine and respectful partnerships provide the opportunity to create an environment that promotes self-determination.

Self-determination requires strong communities and a dynamic and sustainable ACCO-ecosystem.

Our commitment:

We will purposefully invest in genuine and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal communities to promote and grow place-based and First-Nations-led responses.

To succeed, we will focus on:

Establishing and maintain healthy partnerships; engaging in strategic partnering; and promoting place-based partnerships.

We are succeeding when:

Our communities tell us we are a trusted and safe partner. We are approached by First Nations communities and organisations as a partner of choice.

First Nations community-led solutions are realised, recognised and celebrated.

Key partnerships have been transitioned into independent community-controlled entities.

Our strategy in action

North Coast partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)



Northern NSW is a region where the ACCO ecosystem is comparatively strong. Over the past few years, Uniting Communities has entered into several partnerships. Each is unique depending on the context of the work with each partnership being formalised by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Futures Planning and Support

Uniting has partnered with Burrun Dalai, a Kempsey based ACCO, to deliver this service supporting young people who have left out-of-home care. In this partnership, Uniting is engaged as a subcontractor by Burrun Dalai to provide targeted services, and they are jointly working towards accomplishing the program's overarching objectives.

Nambucca Valley

Since 2019, Uniting has delivered Aboriginal Families Together (AFT) in the Nambucca Valley Local Government Area (LGA). Uniting and three Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALC) from the Nambucca Valley have recently entered into a formal partnership - Bowraville LALC, Nambucca Heads LALC and Unkya LALC. This will see Uniting work with its partners to plan and deliver new culturally appropriate services to support children and families in the area. Our LALC partners tell us that this MOU is only the second time in history that the three Lands Councils have formally cooperated.

Cabbage Tree Island - Wardell

As part of our work to support people impacted by the Northern Rivers flooding of 2022, Communities team members worked with members of the Cabbage Tree Island community who were displaced by flooding. Impressed by how Uniting engaged with community in a respectful and genuine way, Jali Local Aboriginal Lands Council invited Uniting to work with them in supporting the community in the next phase of their recovery. The partnership with Jali resulted in Uniting being contracted by NSW Government to provide housing management and support services to the community in the Wardell temporary housing village. As a direct result of Uniting's work with Jali/Cabbage Tree Island community, Uniting was contracted to deliver further temporary housing villages in Brunswick Heads.

“Uniting is incredibly well placed to implement and manage these recovery programs. Our local knowledge and experience alongside our organisational capacity and infrastructure has made pulling these programs together so much easier. Our strong commitment to quality service delivery and genuine trauma-informed practice sets us apart from other agencies. I feel so lucky to be part of such a dynamic and diverse organisation committed to supporting our community.”

NIKI GILL, FAR NORTH COAST LEAD

Our Leadership



Why it's important:

First Nations people as decision-makers is central to the principle of self-determination.

An ambitious and transformational commitment requires leaders across Uniting who take and share ownership of the strategy, over the long term and despite organisational or environmental changes.

Transparency and tracking our achievements and learnings is critical to ensuring our effectiveness and integrity to our commitments.

Our commitment:

We are committed to strong governance including leadership practices that uphold our integrity and accountability to First Nations people and communities.

To succeed, we will focus on:

Empowering First Nations leadership in the decision-making process; enhancing accountability and transparency; and cultivating committed and inclusive leadership.

We are succeeding when:

First Nations leadership is embedded in leadership structures. We are successfully meeting the outcomes of the strategy and reporting and data is agreed with First Nations People and communities. We are attracting leaders with First Nations capability and are seen by sector/peers as a collaborative and inclusive leader.

Our strategy in action

More than a system - Weavr is a Community of Champions in Reconciliation

Transparency, and tracking our achievements and learnings against our strategy commitments, is critical to ensure our effectiveness and integrity.

To achieve this, Uniting has partnered with Indigenous IT company LOGiT, who have developed a reporting tool called Weavr.

Weavr is a transparency tool. It supports businesses to demonstrate their institutional integrity by embedding reconciliation in every part of their organisation, and making the actions and deliverables accessible to all their staff so they can contribute and actively participate.

Because Weavr facilitates communication across all directorates at Uniting, it stimulates conversations, questions, knowledge sharing and truth-telling.

Weavr supports cultural awareness, which leads to more meaningful interactions. Through greater understanding, there is greater respect and empathy for other people, and a celebration of differences as well as similarities. Weavr will help create real outcomes for mob by keeping track of our First Nations People and Place Strategy journey.

“Weavr is an important tool that will assist us in ensuring that we hold ourselves accountable to the commitments against our strategy. Also, it will ensure that our actions are well-intentioned, well-structured, closely tracked, and respectful of the right to self-determination of our First Nations people and the communities we serve.”

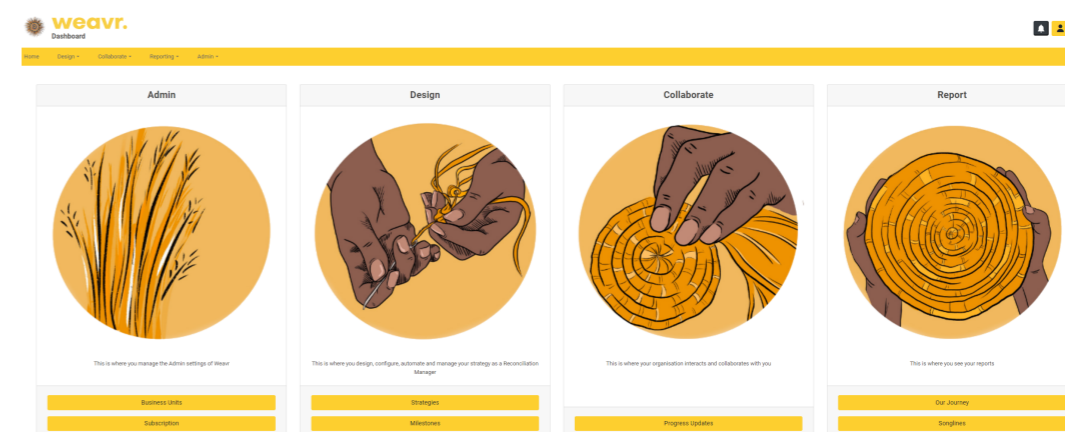
MARY DUCUSIN, DIRECTOR CUSTOMER RISK AND GOVERNANCE

“Since time immemorial First Nations people have been weaving using all forms of material to create shelters, clothing, bags and toys. These skills have been handed down through generations, weavers passing on stories and knowledge while gathering materials and making creations.

Each woven piece holds an important story. One strand by itself is weak. But many strands together are strong. Weaving these strong strands in an interlacing pattern shows how these interconnected elements are critical to the integrity of the piece.

Weaving is about connecting, learning, listening and sharing. Weavr represents these many elements. We are showing how this ancient practice can help bring modern and practical solutions into the workplace.”

FROM LOGIT WEBSITE





Our Impact

Why it's important:

First Nations self-determination requires our social and economic systems to shift. It requires a collective and deep shifts of policies, mindsets, behaviors, relationships, power dynamics and institutions.

As the service delivery and advocacy arm of the Uniting Church NSW.ACT, we have a mandate to use our voice, experience and expertise to drive these shifts, and contribute to truth-telling, voice and healing at a societal level.

Our commitment:

We will elevate the First Nations agenda and impact systems empowering First Nations people and communities through innovation, advocacy and research.

To succeed, we will focus on:

Engaging in advocacy and promoting allyship; investing in social innovation; conducting research and shaping social policy.

We are succeeding when:

When First Nations communities invite Uniting to partner on innovative initiatives/projects important to First Nations justice, healing and self-determination.

Uniting is an actively visible ally and invited by First Nations people, communities and alliances to strongly advocate on matters important to First Nations justice, healing and self-determination.

We are engaging with thought leaders and policy owners on matters important to First Nations justice, healing and self-determination.

Our strategy in action Aboriginal Families Together

Aboriginal Families Together (AFT) is a co-design initiative operating in Dubbo and Nambucca. Its primary objective is to enhance outcomes for Aboriginal children and families and support them to flourish. AFT is an integral component of Uniting's Future Horizons portfolio, which encompasses self-funded social innovations.

In 2019, Aboriginal playgroups were established with the aim of cultivating community cohesion, enhancing trust, gaining insight into the challenges faced by Aboriginal families, and providing a culturally safe space for families with young children to connect, exchange experiences, and facilitate a smooth transition into early childhood education.

By the close of 2022, AFT had collaborated with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) and received guidance from Aunty Vicky Charles to enhance the team's co-design capabilities, blending design thinking approaches with Indigenous wisdom and traditions.

At the same time, the playgroup relationships deepened, providing a foundation for identifying, co-designing or amplifying place-based innovations. Additionally, a focus on local leadership was identified and an Aboriginal Advisory Group was established to co-design solutions to the challenges identified in both regions.

These investments have been catalytic in nature in both Dubbo and Nambucca, fostering small-scale innovations and supporting the development of community leaders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) at the local level.



“Co-design is self-determination in motion. AFT is working hard through co-design and place-based initiatives to make systems fit our people’s needs. We are proudly driven by the voices of our community, families and Elders.”

KEVIN JONES, REGIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER
EARLY INTERVENTION

Our strategy has been designed with key principles as guardrails



Respect
We value and celebrate our history, culture, wisdom, life experience, local knowledge and each other.

Unity
We are united in culture and promote a connected and inclusive voice – we seek unity in diversity.

Culture
We provide cultural leadership, advancing the capability of Uniting’s people through learning and knowledge sharing.

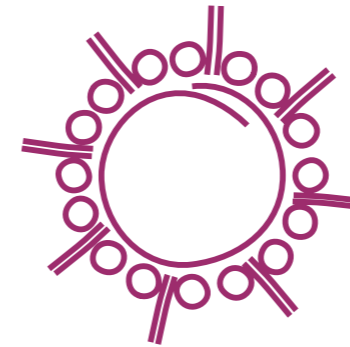
Impact
We aim to achieve greater social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal people by increasing our workforce and capability.

Partner
We respect local knowledge and will partner with Aboriginal communities to co-design social innovations through self-determining ways of knowing, being and doing.

Integrity
Our actions will be transparent, client-focused, and achievable.

Measure
We measure our progress accurately with integrity and data sovereignty while ensuring our reporting is shared with First Nations people and communities.

Our artists



Saretta Fielding

Saretta Fielding is a Wonnarua woman of the Upper Hunter Valley. She has lived in NSW all her life and has strong connections across country, holding strong family and community ties throughout the state. Her connections link into Worimi, Awabakal and Darkinjung tribal groups, as she lives and works closely across these communities over many years. She has also worked across the state and nation, both in Aboriginal not-for-profits and with her artwork.

Her love of culture, country and community are reflected within her work. Her passion is to share her unique and invaluable culture through authentic, engaging and thought-evoking fine artwork and visual design that welcomes all and enhances connection to spirit and country.

We commissioned Saretta to work with documentation that was previously developed in a Jaanimili workshop to create a number of illustrations with a First Nations perspective.



Colin Wightman

Colin Wightman was a Gomeri tribesman who loved to paint. The Gomeri tribe can be found in the southern part of Queensland and northern end of inland NSW. He had said that he paints because it “tells the stories of the tribe I am from” and that he “paints what I see and what I was told by my Nan and other elders of the Gomeri tribe.”

Sadly, Colin passed away in 2015.

In our past, Uniting Burnside and the former Aboriginal Unit Jaanimili, commissioned Colin to design the Jaanimili logo. He was later commissioned to paint a number of artworks that depicted stories of his ancestors through local animals - the kangaroo, lizard and dragonfly.

We’ve chosen these artworks to be incorporated into our Ngumbadal identity. As we reflect on our journey and appreciate the artist’s deep connection and the captivating artistry of his artwork, we find it fitting to recognise and pay tribute to our historical ties.



Charmaine Mumbulla

Charmaine Mumbulla is a proud Kaurna/Narungga woman from Point Pearce in South Australia, with family ties to the Gumbaynggirr people of the NSW Mid North Coast. Her background is in arts, education and social justice law.

As a professional digital artist, Charmaine has carved out a space as a highly regarded creative professional and was named winner of the National NAIDOC Poster Competition for 2019. Charmaine is passionate about working on projects that support reconciliation and social justice. Using bright colours and organic shapes, Charmaine’s designs are influenced by natural elements found throughout the traditional countries where she lives and works.

Our reconciliation artwork, designed by Charmaine, reflects Ngumbadal, meaning ‘unity/union/as one’ in the Wiradjuri language.

About Uniting

Uniting NSW.ACT contributes to the work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, through social justice advocacy, community services and spiritual care.

We provide services for people through all ages and stages of life, and drive solutions to systemic issues so people experiencing disadvantage can live their best lives.

Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

We value diversity and always welcome everyone exactly as they are.

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Uniting