

# Our journey of hope and growth.



# **Uniting NSW.ACT acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples.**

**We acknowledge Aboriginal peoples<sup>1</sup> as the original and ongoing Custodians of the lands and waters on which we all live and work.**

**We recognise the continuing sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, and their absolute right to self-determination.**

**We pay our respects to all Elders – past, present and emerging – and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.**

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Aboriginal peoples' is used in this Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), on the advice of our Aboriginal stakeholders, to refer to the First Peoples of NSW and the ACT. This term recognises the great number of Aboriginal nations, and the diversity of cultures, histories, languages and values of these many nations. This RAP does not refer specifically to Torres Strait Islander peoples unless contextually relevant. It is important to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are very different, with their own unique histories, beliefs and values, and it is respectful to recognise their separate identities. We acknowledge that Torres Strait Islander peoples are among the First Nations of Australia, and all Uniting Aboriginal programs and services in NSW and the ACT are available to Torres Strait Islander peoples.

# Contents.

Ngumba-Dal means unity	4
Message from Heather Watson	6
Message from Tracey Burton	7
Message from Reconciliation Australia	8
Our reconciliation vision	9
Our work	10
Our way	11
Our reconciliation journey	16
Our RAP is a work in progress	20
Our RAP Working Group	21
Our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan	23
• Relationships	24
• Respect	29
• Opportunities	34
• Governance	38
The journey of hope and growth continues	42



# Ngumba-Dal means unity.

“This Reconciliation Action Plan artwork reflects Ngumba-Dal, meaning ‘unity/union/as one’ in the Wiradjuri language.

The central theme of unity is represented by a large and vibrant circle. Within the circle is a cross, symbolising Uniting serving people and communities through Christ. Surrounded by green leaves, a lilly pilli fruit sits in the heart of the artwork. Lilly pillies were an abundant and nutritious fruit in the diet of the Aboriginal peoples throughout NSW and the ACT. So too,



this lilly pilli represents nourishment, growth and abundance.

Uniting team members shared many beautiful words to describe their values, including hope, optimism, love, joy, happiness and warmth. These are represented by the yellow sun – part of a radiating set of concentric circles.

This artwork pays tribute to the diversity of Aboriginal countries, lands and languages across NSW and the ACT, where Uniting provides its many programs and services. The outer circle is divided into four parts, each representing different landscapes – including coastal areas, rainforests, mountains/tablelands and desert plains. The red and white graphic elements surrounding this outer circle represent the many people and voices within the organisation. Together, and with heart, they support the people and communities that Uniting serves.”

**Charmaine Mumbulla**

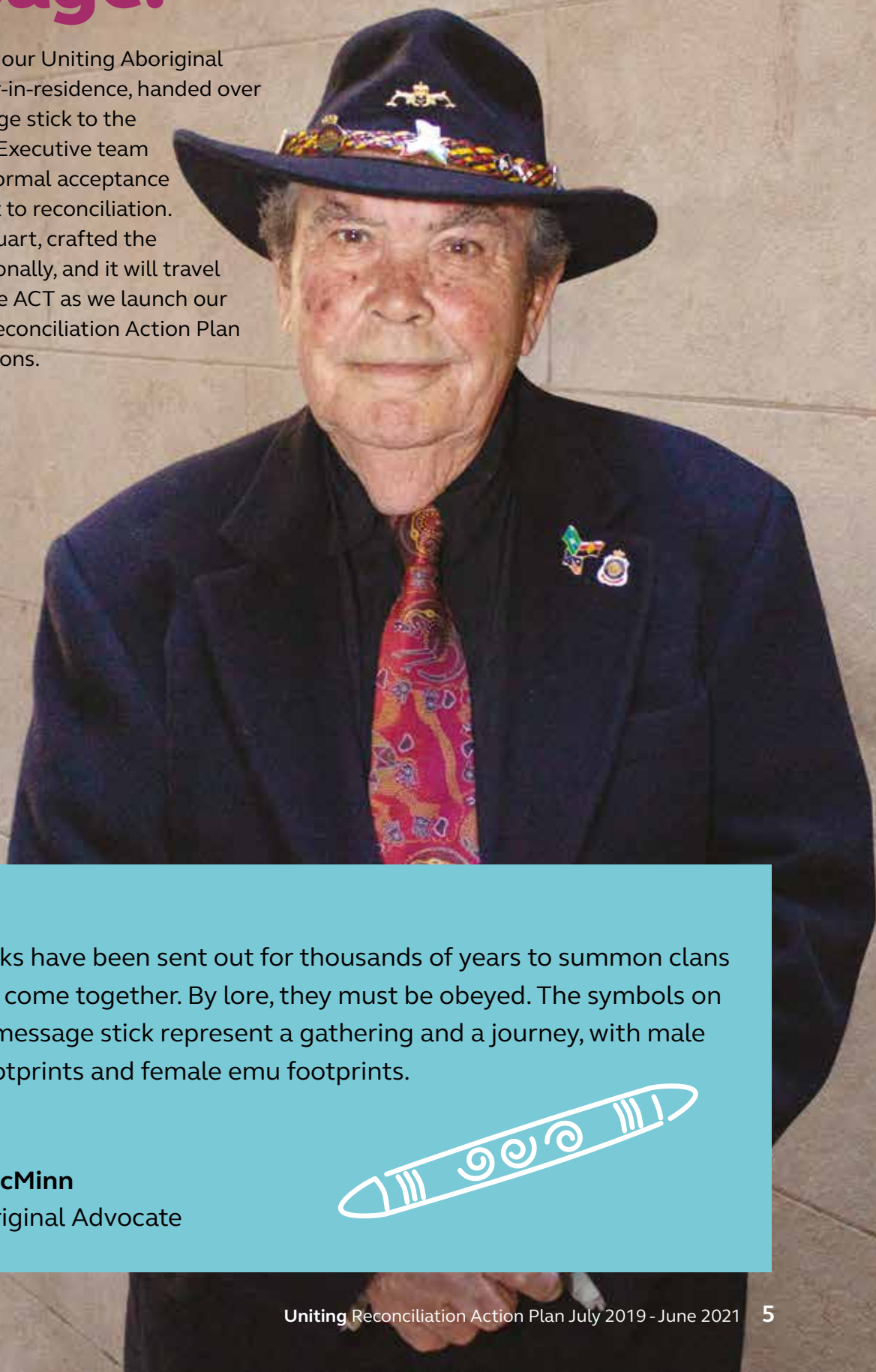
## About the artist

Charmaine Mumbulla is a proud Kurna/Narungga woman from Point Pearce in South Australia, with family ties to the Gumbaynggirr people of the NSW Mid North Coast. Together with her partner, she runs a Sydney-based creative agency called Mumbulla Creative. Charmaine has a background in education, graphic design, and law, and is passionate about working on projects that support reconciliation and social justice. She works closely with organisations to tell their stories through her art.



# Sending our message.

Uncle Ray McMinn, our Uniting Aboriginal Advocate and Elder-in-residence, handed over a traditional message stick to the Uniting Board and Executive team in March 2019, as formal acceptance of the commitment to reconciliation. Uncle Ray's son, Stuart, crafted the message stick personally, and it will travel across NSW and the ACT as we launch our Uniting Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan in key service locations.

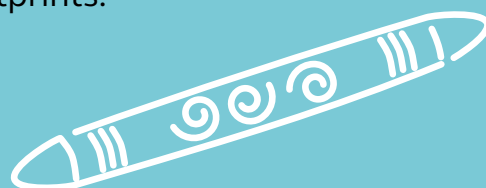


“

Message sticks have been sent out for thousands of years to summon clans and tribes to come together. By lore, they must be obeyed. The symbols on our Uniting message stick represent a gathering and a journey, with male kangaroo footprints and female emu footprints.

”

**Uncle Ray McMinn**  
Uniting Aboriginal Advocate





# Message from Heather Watson.



**Uniting's reconciliation journey is taking an important step forward as, through this plan, we renew and evolve our commitments to reconciliation between First Australians and non-Indigenous Australians.**

Central to our reconciliation journey is that Uniting, as part of the Uniting Church, recognises the sovereignty of First Australians. We acknowledge that the land we work and live on was, is, and always will be Aboriginal land.

We acknowledge the terrible and lasting impacts of colonisation. Through acts of violence and discrimination, through enforced family separations and the removal of children from their families, through racist policies and social support structures, First Australians have suffered immeasurable pain and grief. They have had to endure the loss of family, land and cultural identity.

On behalf of Uniting, I apologise for the actions that have led to so much suffering and to many First Australians remaining entrenched in a devastating cycle of disadvantage. We are committed to reconciliation and doing everything we can to build a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; a future that is self-determined and self-governed.

At Uniting, our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities, and confront injustice. Through this next step in our reconciliation journey, our vision is to inspire and enliven Aboriginal peoples and communities, and to confront injustices impacting Aboriginal peoples and communities.

In our Reconciliation Action Plan, the emphasis is on action. We are committed to achieving real and lasting change for our Aboriginal colleagues and clients, and wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Uniting Board and Executive team is committed to being at the forefront of this change, leading on our commitments to achieve our vision.

I would like to thank Uniting's Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group for their efforts in shaping this plan, enabling us to take this next step in our reconciliation journey. I would also like to thank Reconciliation Australia for their endorsement of our plan and their support in preparing it.

We will walk alongside our Aboriginal colleagues and clients, employees and volunteers, the Uniting Church and our many partners on this journey to reconciliation.

**Heather Watson**  
Uniting Board NSW.ACT Chair



# Message from Tracey Burton.



**Uniting's journey to reconciliation began when the Uniting Church was established in 1977. Through the Church, we have been a loud voice for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for over 40 years, and that journey continues as we strive for lasting change that will be determined and guided by our Aboriginal colleagues and clients, their families, and the wider Aboriginal community.**

The need for this Reconciliation Action Plan stems from the painful history of colonisation, the impacts of which are still raw and distressing today. We are sorry for the suffering Australia's First Peoples have endured and for the fact we cannot change what has happened. We are committing to ensuring its effects aren't perpetuated and that we build a culture within and outside Uniting where there is equality and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also want to protect the ancient and vibrant culture of Australia's First Peoples through active acknowledgement and celebration.

We are clear that this plan shouldn't just be a document that collects dust on a shelf. We are committing to tangible actions in two key areas.

Firstly, we want to make Uniting a safe and welcoming workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and ensure they are given equal opportunity to thrive in the work that they do. As well as enhancing the opportunities and capability of our existing Aboriginal employees, we will create targeted recruitment and retention strategies. We want the Aboriginal voice elevated in everything we do.

Secondly, we will evolve and enhance the services we offer to Aboriginal peoples and communities. We want to reverse entrenched disadvantage where it exists and make sure our services are accessible, welcoming and culturally supportive.

Building our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is fundamental to our success in these two areas and within our refreshed Reconciliation Action Plan, we are asking all Uniting employees and volunteers to commit to learn more, build their understanding and confront injustice and discrimination when they see it. As well as the commitments outlined in this plan, I am personally committing to make a difference through my actions, words, behaviours and decisions each day.

Thank you to everyone who has helped us deliver this refreshed Reconciliation Action Plan, endorsed by Reconciliation Australia as an Innovate Plan. The real work is in achieving the commitments we have made, and I look forward to keeping you updated on our progress.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracey Burton'.

**Tracey Burton**  
Executive Director

# Message from Reconciliation Australia.



On behalf of Reconciliation Australia, I am delighted to see Uniting continue its reconciliation journey and to formally endorse its second RAP. Through the development of an Innovate RAP, Uniting continues to play an important part in a community of over 1,000 dedicated corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have formally committed to reconciliation through the RAP program since its inception in 2006.

RAP organisations across Australia are turning good intentions into positive actions, helping to build higher trust, lower prejudice, and increase pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Reconciliation is no one single issue or agenda. Based on international research and benchmarking, Reconciliation Australia defines and measures reconciliation through five critical dimensions: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance. All sections of the community - governments, civil society, the private sector, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities - have a role to play to progress these dimensions.

The RAP program provides a framework for organisations to advance reconciliation within their spheres of influence. This Innovate RAP provides Uniting with the key steps to establish its own unique approach to reconciliation. Through implementing an Innovate RAP, Uniting will strengthen its approach to driving reconciliation through its business activities, services and programs, and develop mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

We wish Uniting well as it embeds and expands its own unique approach to reconciliation.

We encourage Uniting to embrace this journey with open hearts and minds, to grow from the challenges, and to build on its successes. As the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation reminded the nation in its final report:

**“Reconciliation is hard work - it’s a long, winding and corrugated road, not a broad, paved highway. Determination and effort at all levels of government and in all sections of the community will be essential to make reconciliation a reality.”**

On behalf of Reconciliation Australia, I commend Uniting on its second RAP, and look forward to following its ongoing reconciliation journey.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to Karen Mundine, Chief Executive Officer of Reconciliation Australia. The signature is stylized and fluid.

**Karen Mundine**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Reconciliation Australia



# **Our reconciliation vision.**

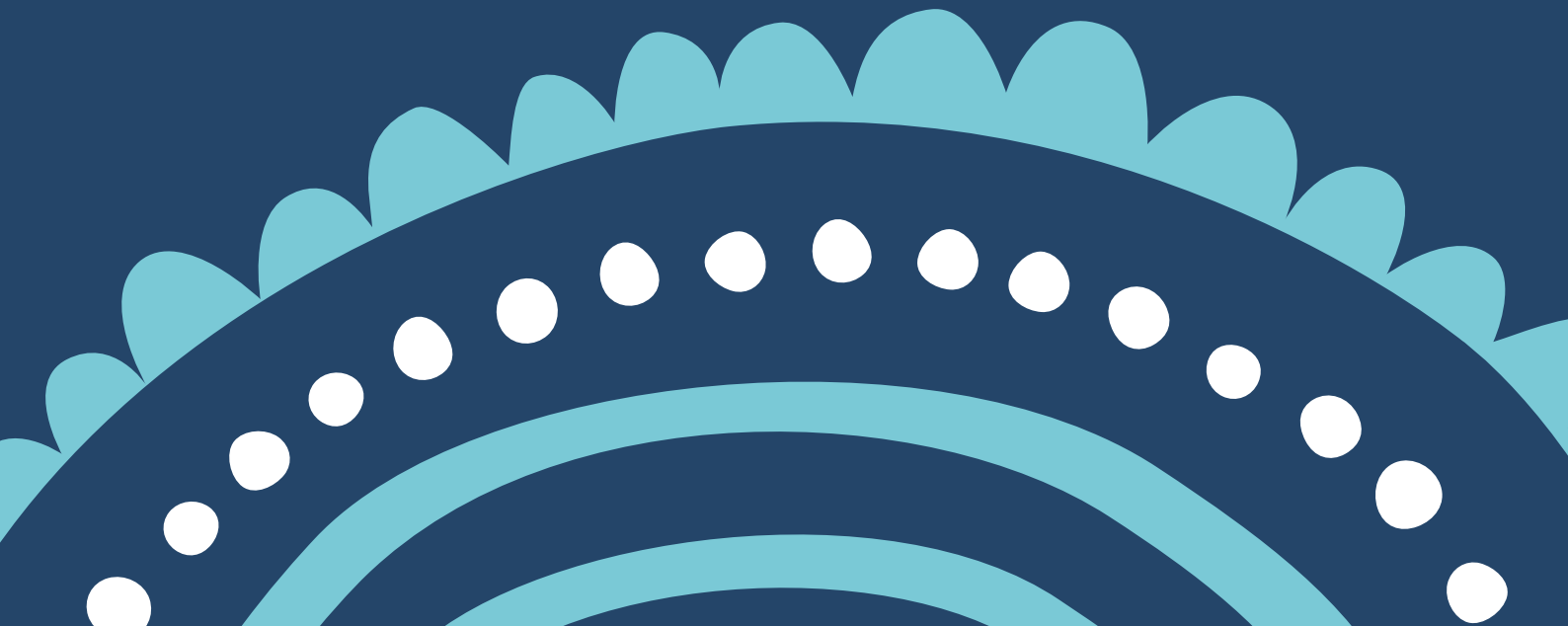
**We inspire** Aboriginal peoples.

**We enliven** Aboriginal communities.

**We confront injustices** impacting Aboriginal peoples and communities.

**We do this by being** compassionate, respectful, imaginative and bold.

**We are Uniting.**





# Our work.

**Uniting is responsible for the social justice, community services and chaplaincy work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, providing care and support for people through all ages and stages of life and with a focus on the vulnerable and disadvantaged.**

Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. We celebrate diversity and welcome everyone exactly as they are.

Uniting is the largest non-government provider of community services in NSW and the ACT, with nearly 9,000 employees, including almost 300 Aboriginal employees, and more than 2,000 volunteers offering around 400 services supporting more than 50,000 people each year. We operate throughout NSW and the ACT, from Tweed Heads in the north, to Bega in the south, and out to Broken Hill in the Central West.

As part of our Future Horizons strategy, and the Aboriginal Families Together initiative, we are currently investing in innovative co-designed programs that we hope will make a lasting difference for young people in out-of-home care, for Aboriginal families, and for socially and economically excluded communities.

For more information please refer to the Uniting Annual Report at [uniting.org](http://uniting.org)

## **Our Aboriginal Families Together Future Horizons initiative**

will offer a long-term commitment and an extensive scoping period with selected Aboriginal families and communities. Uniting will listen deeply to the extenuating barriers for Aboriginal families, reimagining the support and services needed from an evidence-based and co-designed approach with selected communities.

This Future Horizons work will set a precedent for early intervention into Aboriginal communities and will reach Aboriginal families facing systemic challenges with limited or desired service system choices. The outcome is for Aboriginal families to remain together and not experience the removal of children from family or cultural kinship care.

“

**Family-finding and keeping connections is really important in Aboriginal culture.**

”

**Leticia Quince**, Uniting Youth Development Coach



# Our way.

**An Aboriginal cultural governance approach in the Uniting workplace is the practice used for effective engagement and consultation with and between Aboriginal voices. Our Aboriginal Cultural Governance Circle provides a means for many voices to reach a central point which can be heard across the entire organisation.**

Reflecting the union inherent in the Wiradjuri word Ngumba-Dal, Uncle Ray McMinn regularly shares his vision of belonging as one – for all Aboriginal nations to return to a sharing of cultural values and a singular, united voice.

This one voice requires cultural safety to stay active and engaged. Uniting has previously used self-determination models to acknowledge and respect Aboriginal culture, and more recently we have been evolving unity of voice through the current Uniting Aboriginal workforce member identity, Ngumba-Dal.





# Our Ngumba-Dal identity.

**Ngumba-Dal was chosen through a consultation process with our Aboriginal employees to represent the significance of cultural identity, connection and voice as part of the Uniting team.**

This collective of Aboriginal employees is now known as the Ngumba-Dal Network. It reflects the united voice of our Aboriginal employees, and provides connection with our Aboriginal clients, families and communities, who all seek to be heard. As one Aboriginal voice we seek to right past wrongs and injustices, and to improve the lives of those who are unfairly disempowered and disengaged in our communities.

More significantly, Ngumba-Dal acts to remind Uniting, its leadership team and all employees, of the need to recognise, respect and connect Aboriginal voices to governance and decision making. Without the engagement and

inclusion of Ngumba-Dal in decisions affecting Uniting business, people and services, the organisation would be viewed as imposing its way upon Aboriginal people and communities.

Our Ngumba-Dal identity serves as a reminder to everyone at Uniting to speak proudly of our Aboriginal voice in decision making, practice review and service design. It offers a clear signal that Uniting is a respectful and culturally-safe employer and workplace for Aboriginal peoples, and communicates that Uniting is committed to working collaboratively with Aboriginal communities, and to walking respectfully alongside them as they seek fairness and justice.





## Our Aboriginal Cultural Governance Circle (ACGC)

The formation of the Uniting Aboriginal Cultural Governance Circle, in April 2018, represents our organisation-wide commitment to Australia's First Peoples. Comprising up to 20 of our Aboriginal employees, the ACGC leads, collaborates and engages on our Aboriginal cultural governance model, building on our work with and for Aboriginal peoples. It demonstrates our willingness to listen deeply with Aboriginal communities, to work collaboratively on complex challenges, recognise past achievements and explore new and improved practices that will serve our vision and purpose.

## Our Aboriginal Service Development Unit (ASDU)

Our Aboriginal Service Development Unit serves an important leadership role in assuring strong cultural conscience and ensuring our programs are accessible to, and culturally appropriate for, Aboriginal peoples and communities across NSW and the ACT.

The ASDU offers the opportunity for Aboriginal capacity-building partnerships through agreements with Aboriginal community-controlled enterprises, acting as a conduit between Uniting and partner organisations to scope, develop and achieve mutual social impact outcomes.

## Yarning Circles

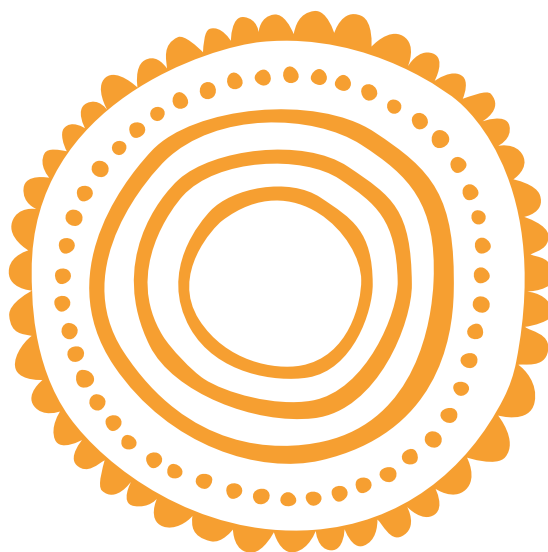
Also known as Yarn-ups, Yarning Circles are a traditional and timeless way of sharing our stories to nurture empathy and connection.

All participants have the chance to speak in a safe and non-judgmental space, and to share their strengths in an inclusive and collaborative learning environment. Yarning is a way to bring our Aboriginal employees together in small forums that focus on strengths, not problem-solving or criticism.

Uniting recognises the significant role our Aboriginal employees play in supporting local community engagement initiatives, and the need to link skills and knowledge so that everyone is valued, supported and empowered to have their voices heard. At least twice a year we facilitate regional Yarning Circles, to which all our Aboriginal staff and invited guests are welcome.

## Aboriginal Staff Gatherings

The ASDU facilitates an Aboriginal Staff Gathering each year, to communicate and consult on important Uniting work, and to support onboarding and training. The Gathering highlights the collective strength and cultural knowledge of our Aboriginal employees, and invites leaders and other staff for workshops and collaboration.







# Building resilience for independence.

**As a Youth Development Coach in Western NSW, Leticia Quince supports young people on the path to independence through the Uniting Extended Care Pilot Program.**

Her journey with Uniting began as a child in foster care, and later with our Aboriginal Aftercare Statewide Service, a unique program designed to support the transition to independent living after out-of-home care. Leticia credits Uniting Aftercare for her successful shift to independence, and today she continues her journey with us as one of the five committed Youth Development Coaches in our Uniting Extended Care Pilot Program.

Through Leticia's work, it became apparent that young people leaving out-of-home care were at serious risk of homelessness, exposure to drugs and alcohol, and mental health issues without appropriate transitional support. She knows from lived experience just how daunting it is to leave the safety and security of the nest, and suddenly have to figure out where you're going to live and how you're going to support yourself.

Leticia liaises with caseworkers, carers and the community to support young people in pursuing their goals and aspirations. They receive guidance on education and employment, health and wellbeing, safe accommodation and living skills, and opportunities to connect with their community.

For the young Aboriginal people in the program, exposure and connection to culture is a critical component of the process. They need the opportunity to learn, experience and value their culture and community, in order to develop a strong sense of identity. Leticia believes, "If they don't have that opportunity, there'll always be a sense that something's missing".

Leticia deepened her own cultural identity with the support of Uniting, and now describes herself as a proud Wiradjuri woman from Narrandera.

Currently supporting 13 people between the ages of 15 and 21, Leticia's work takes her right across Western NSW. With her insights and guidance, we're working with an external evaluator to measure the outcomes of the Extended Care Pilot, and we're aiming to contribute to the growing body of evidence indicating that young people leaving care need to be supported beyond 18 if they are to experience the same opportunities as their peers. For the young Aboriginal people in our care, this is an empowering example of how we are actively working towards Closing the Gap.



**"We need more support for transitioning young Aboriginal people coming out of foster care into independent living, and linking to their cultural connections."**

**Leticia Quince, Uniting Youth Development Coach**

**Recognition and  
healing starts with  
communication.**



# Our reconciliation journey.

The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) has a long history of engagement with Australia's First Peoples.

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) was established more than 30 years ago to support Aboriginal peoples, families and communities across NSW and the ACT with Ministry and Mission services.

Uniting is responsible for the social justice, community services and chaplaincy work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT.

Together, we are committed to working harder to find ways to empower Aboriginal peoples, families and communities, and to support aspirations of self-determination and self-governance.



UCA



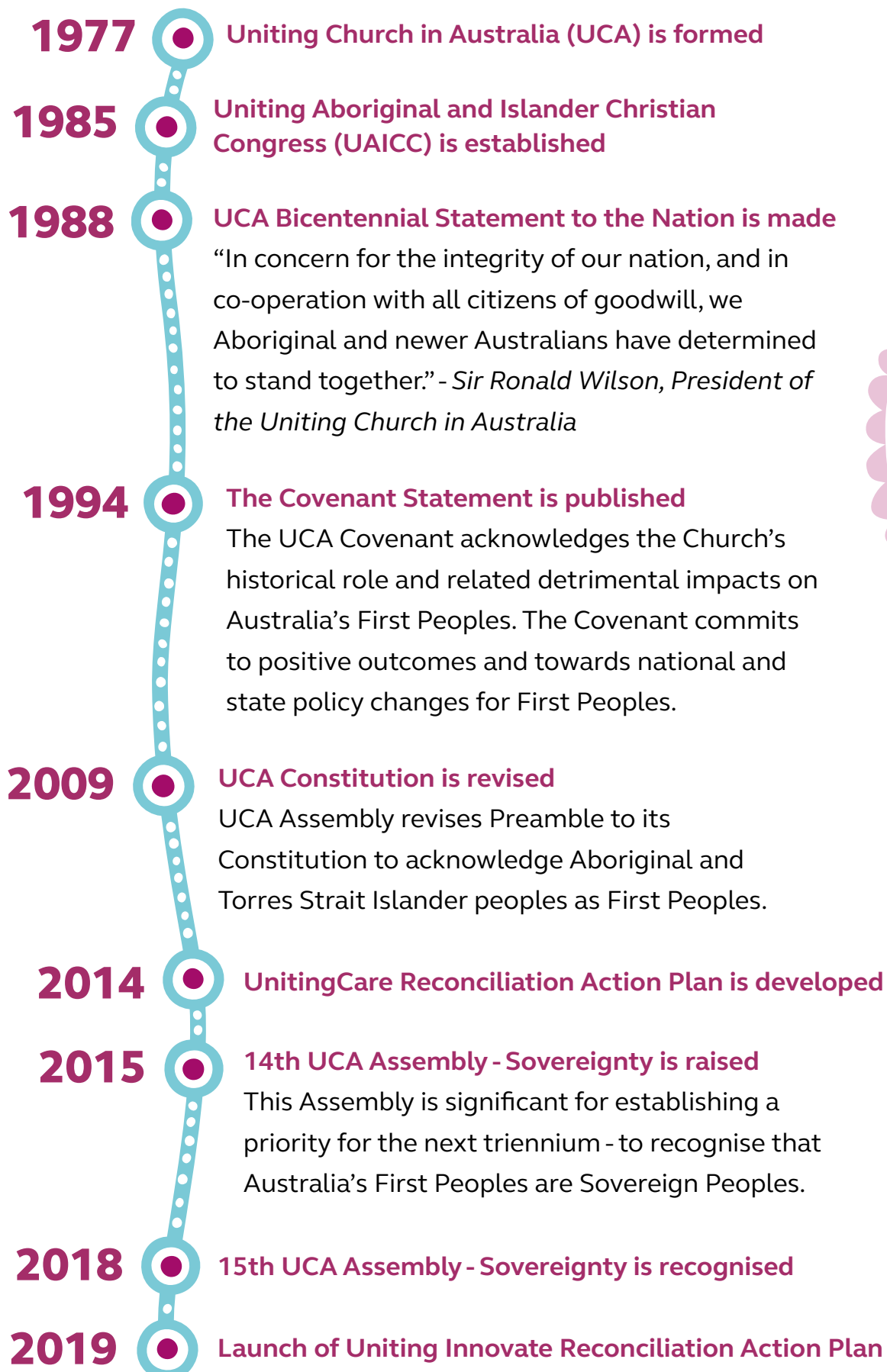
UAICC

**Uniting**

**“In the last two centuries the movements of history have brought together, here in one nation, people of diverse cultures. As a church which is itself composed of many cultures and races, both Aboriginal and migrant, we rejoice in the vision of a multicultural society where these peoples may live together in unity and diversity, maintaining different cultural traditions, yet forging a common destiny based on commitment to the ideals of equality of opportunity, tolerance, justice and compassion.**

**At the same time, those of us who have migrated to Australia in the last two centuries, or are the descendants of migrants, confess that all of us are beneficiaries of the injustices that have been inflicted on Aboriginal people. In varying degrees, we all contribute to, and perpetuate those injustices.”**

**Sir Ronald Wilson**, then-President of the Uniting Church in Australia, in his 1988 Statement to the Nation





# Meet the Aboriginal foster carers making a difference in Western NSW.

Home for children in foster care can take on many forms, some less traditional than others. For one young boy who regularly spent nights in a hotel room due to a lack of carers, the stability of a foster family has made an incredible difference.

He's being cared for by two Aboriginal men on a 50-acre property shared with three dogs, seven horses and 30 sheep. Kodi, 37, and his 44-year-old partner Gary, had often contemplated fostering as they both have experience working in the community services sector and were aware of the shortage of foster carers in their community.

Through their sector connections they found out about this young boy and decided to become foster parents with Uniting. Kodi was reluctant at first, "as we didn't want to further disadvantage a child through any stigma associated with having two dads." The opposite has since proven to be the case for their young charge, who sees it as an advantage to have two male role models in his life where previously there were none. "It was initially meant to be an emergency care placement, but we all connected so it just made sense to continue as a long-term option. It's the best decision we've made."

Kodi and Gary have now been carers for three years, providing the boy with his most stable and secure placement. "And between us all, we share three different faiths and still manage to live in harmony", Kodi jokes. He's Catholic, Gary is a Jehovah's Witness and, in line with the wishes of his family, their non-Aboriginal foster son is being raised a Seventh Day Adventist.

**"At the end of the day, what really matters is that kids have a consistent, safe and secure place to call home. Sure, it can be challenging at times, but it's also incredibly rewarding and there's always plenty of support if we need it."**

**Kodi**  
Foster parent with Uniting





# Walking on Country.

**Our Mission Directorate commits to making the world a better place through chaplaincy, pastoral practice, and wider Church engagement and collaboration.**

One way of honouring and respecting the lands we live and work on, and the communities we serve, is through our annual Walking on Country tour. The tours began in 2017 with Walking on Bundjalung Country, and the 2018 tour was through Yorta Yorta Country.

The Riverina Presbytery of the Uniting Church is coordinating Walking on Country 2019, enabling participants from all walks of life to travel through Central Australia and Outback NSW, in fellowship with Congress Churches all along the way. An important component of the two-week tour is meeting with local Aboriginal communities to gain a deeper understanding of Country and cultural practice. Connection and empathy is essential to fostering the hope and growth required for reconciliation.





# Our RAP is a work in progress.

Uniting was formed in 2016 when the Uniting Church set a new strategic direction for multiple UnitingCare business units under one banner. This current Uniting Innovate RAP builds on our previous UnitingCare RAP from 2014 -16 and the Burnside Aboriginal strategy, Jaanimili.

Reflecting on the goals and aspirations of the previous RAP, in early 2018 we identified key achievements and learnings to inform our commitments moving forward. Our RAP Working Group (RAPWG) was selected from a Uniting-wide Expression of Interest process, including Board members, Executive Directors, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees. A facilitated workshop in November 2018 enabled our RAPWG to create and agree

on the foundations for the mandatory RAP components addressing Relationships, Respect, Opportunities and Governance.

The Uniting Executive Team champions our RAP internally, and our Aboriginal Service Development Unit plays an integral support role in ensuring our commitments are enacted, reported and evaluated. We are also in the process of developing relationships to establish an external Aboriginal Advisory Group.

**“Reconciliation is about our continuing relationship, recognising and respectfully engaging with our cultural differences. Our agreed Uniting reconciliation commitment will help assure a culturally-safe, inclusive and welcoming workplace for Aboriginal employees, volunteers, and the communities we serve.”**

**Gavin Mate**, Head of Aboriginal Service Development Unit

# Our RAP Working Group.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group (RAPWG) was formed in 2018 and is chaired by the Head of our Aboriginal Service Development Unit, Gavin Mate. While the contributors may change as our commitment evolves, the member profiles will continue to reflect the breadth of knowledge and diversity necessary to inform the thinking, discussion and action required for renewing our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

## **Our terms of reference include these duties and responsibilities:**

- Develop a RAP within the context of Uniting's core business and in line with the Strategic Plan and the Aboriginal Strategy
- Establish a collaborative and consultative process for engaging staff and stakeholders across the organisation, giving meaning to, and encouraging connection with, the RAP
- Identify and endorse ongoing governance requirements for the RAP
- Develop governance mechanisms for reporting progress to Reconciliation Australia
- Project manage the design and delivery of collateral and launch events that support RAP implementation from 1 July 2019
- Design and implement staff and stakeholder evaluation at key RAP intervals
- Lead and support RAP communication and engagement by staff and leaders.

We will pause at key milestones along the way, ensuring we engage and listen to the many voices that will guide our journey of hope and growth. We have enlisted our Aboriginal Cultural Governance Circle (ACGC), to further advise and support cultural consultations that create respectful, meaningful and measurable impacts for Aboriginal employees, clients and communities.



## The RAPWG 2018-2019

### Uncle Ray McMinn

Aboriginal Advocate

### Rev. Dr Chris Budden

The Uniting Church  
Synod of NSW and the ACT

### Heather Watson

Board Chairperson

### Peter Wells

Board Member

### Tracey Burton

Executive Director

### Murray Hipwell

Workforce Engagement  
and Consultation Specialist  
ASDU / ACGC

### Pam Wells

Head of Children,  
Youth and Families  
Western NSW / ACGC

### Julie Hendicott

Support Advisor Home  
and Community Care / ACGC

### Fiona McKenzie

Head of Customer  
Service Delivery

### Neil Goring

Supervisor Uniting  
Grafton Preschool

### Nathan Tyson

Aboriginal Community  
Partnerships Specialist UAICC  
Engagement / ASDU

### Amanda Roa

Early Linker Aboriginal  
Ability Links / ACGC

### Robert Golden

Corporate Recruitment  
Manager / ACGC

### Melanie Dicks

Diversity and Inclusion Lead

### Bob Mulcahy

Director  
Children, Youth and Families

### Jill Reich

Director  
Customer, People and Systems

### Doug Taylor

Director Mission, Communities  
and Social Impact

### Gavin Mate

Head of Aboriginal Service  
Development Unit (ASDU)

### Sharon Rigney

Executive Officer  
Customer, People and Systems

### Katie Yeaman

Family Worker  
Children, Youth and Families

### Peter Jones

Coordinator  
Children, Youth and Families

### Susan Cann

Mission Chaplaincy Convenor

### Joanne Gilkison

Communications and Project  
Officer ASDU / ACGC

### Mellisa Hawkins

Support Advisor  
Home and Community Care

### Tamara Grant

Family Worker  
Children, Youth and Families

### Barry Lenihan

Future Horizons Aboriginal  
Families Together Lead

### Jamie Upton

Permanency and Foster Care  
Recruitment Manager

### Kelly White

Media and Public Affairs Lead

# Our Uniting Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2019-2021.

We will continue listening to the voice of our Aboriginal team members, and the Aboriginal communities we serve, to make sure the priorities we have set deliver on our reconciliation promise. Over the next two years, we commit to the following actions and deliverables on relationships, respect, opportunities and governance.





# Relationships.



Reconciliation requires the forming and maintaining of trusted, respectful relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Uniting is committed to forging partnerships and working collaboratively with Aboriginal peoples and organisations to improve access to our services, input into our planning and service delivery, and improve our service quality and health outcomes.

## ACTION 1

### Engage and support an Aboriginal voice.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>1.1</b> Oversee the ongoing engagement and inclusion of an Aboriginal voice in design, implementation and governance of the Uniting Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).	Review September 2019/20	Deputy Executive Director / Head of Aboriginal Service Development Unit (ASDU)
<b>1.2</b> The RAP Working Group (RAPWG), inclusive of Aboriginal members, will oversee the development, endorsement and launch of the RAP.	July 2019	RAPWG Chairperson / Aboriginal Community & Partnership Specialist
<b>1.3</b> RAPWG will meet at least twice per year to monitor and review RAP implementation progress.	Sept 2019, Feb 2020, Sept 2020, Feb 2021	RAPWG Chairperson / Head of ASDU
<b>1.4</b> RAPWG will actively monitor RAP development, implementation of actions, and tracking of progress.	September 2019/20	RAPWG Chairperson / Head of ASDU
<b>1.5</b> Establish and engage with Aboriginal community voices through regional and place-based advisory and focus groups.	June 2021	Aboriginal Community & Partnership Specialist / ASDU

## ACTION 2

**Participate in National Reconciliation Week, growing and valuing our relationships between Aboriginal peoples and other Australians.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>2.1</b> Recognise and celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW) through the RAP launch and at least one internal event each year.	May 2020/21	Executive Director / Internal Communications / Head of ASDU
<b>2.2</b> RAPWG will co-create and participate in an annual external NRW flagship event, in addition to locally-led events delivered by each service stream.	May 2020/21	Director Customer, People & Systems / Heads of Service Streams
<b>2.3</b> Register all NRW events through Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.	May 2020/21	Heads of Service Streams
<b>2.4</b> Communicate leading messages and encouragement for employees and senior leaders to participate in local community NRW events.	May 2020/21	Head of Internal Communications / Head of ASDU

## ACTION 3

**Grow mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal peoples, communities and organisations to positively respond to needs.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>3.1</b> Co-design, develop and implement an internal Aboriginal governance and engagement plan across two agreed locations.	June 2020	Deputy Executive Director / Future Horizons Aboriginal Families Together Lead
<b>3.2</b> Invite an annual advisory voice of Aboriginal community nominees to meet and inform Uniting Board and Executive Team on RAP deliverables, progress and services.	February 2020/21	Head of ASDU
<b>3.3</b> Develop opportunities supporting growth of UAICC NSW/ACT relationship. Attend biannual Regional Committee Meetings to inform, consult and engage with UAICC.	December 2019/20	Head of ASDU / Head of Church Engagement
<b>3.4</b> Maintain mutual community projects and partnerships to develop Aboriginal community participation in transitioning services back to Aboriginal community management and control.	June 2020	Director Children, Youth & Families
<b>3.5</b> Meet with local Aboriginal organisations or stakeholders to develop guiding principles for future engagement.	September 2020	Aboriginal Community & Partnership Specialist

## ACTION 4

**Communicate our RAP deliverables and aspirations, ensuring employee, leadership, and community awareness.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>4.1</b> Develop and implement a Uniting Reconciliation Communication Plan, inclusive of website publication of the RAP.	July 2019	Director Customer, People & Systems / Marketing Communications
<b>4.2</b> Incorporate RAP messages within employee onboarding program.	December 2019	Head of HR Strategy & Capability
<b>4.3</b> Work with regional and local services to promote stories of reconciliation in action through Uniting communication channels.	September 2020	Head of Reputation, Digital & News
<b>4.4</b> Uniting Board, Executive Team and Heads of Service Streams to promote reconciliation through ongoing active engagement with all stakeholders.	June 2021	Uniting Board / Executive Team / Heads of Service Streams

## ACTION 5

**Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination measures.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>5.1</b> Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions and future needs.	December 2020	Head of Employee Experience/ Lead Diversity & Inclusion
<b>5.2</b> Co-design, develop, and implement an anti-discrimination policy for our organisation and senior leaders.	June 2021	Head of Employee Experience/ Lead Diversity & Inclusion
<b>5.3</b> Educate senior leaders on the effects of racism.	June 2021	Head of Employee Experience/ Lead Diversity & Inclusion
<b>5.4</b> Engage with Aboriginal team members and/or Aboriginal advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy.	June 2021	Head of Employee Experience/ Lead Diversity & Inclusion

# Grafton preschoolers learn to acknowledge the land with local Aboriginal Elder.

In November 2018, the children at Uniting Preschool Grafton presented their own Acknowledgement of Country at a special event following eight weeks of learning about culture, language and oral traditions with local Aboriginal Elder, Uncle Roger Duroux.

Partnering with Bundjalung Cultural Experience to deliver the program through art, games, song and dance, Uncle Roger worked with the preschoolers to create their own Acknowledgement to include in their morning welcome every day.

Director of Uniting Preschool Grafton, Neil Gorrington, has been instrumental in creating an environment where Aboriginal language and culture is embedded in daily learning.

He's a member of the Grafton Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and he ensured the project was structured in a way that was meaningful and relevant to the three Aboriginal nations of the Clarence Valley: Bundjalung; Gumbaynggirr; and Yaegl.

Funded through the State Government's Ninganah No More (Silence No More) program, this project was the culmination of close to two years of behind-the-scenes work by Neil.

**"Let's bring culture and learning back to the little ones. I want them to understand that our culture is here and it's alive. Our language was asleep for a little while, but now it's woken up, and it's being taught in the schools."**

**Uncle Roger Duroux**  
Bundjalung and  
Gumbaynggirr Elder





# Respect.

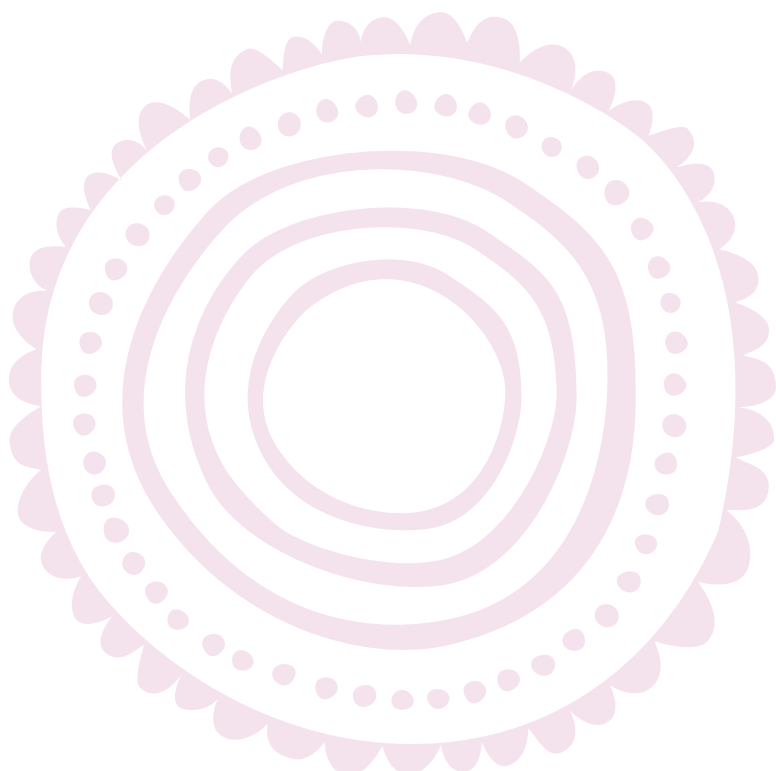
Being respectful is one of our four Uniting core values, along with being imaginative, compassionate, and bold. Acknowledging the cultural diversity amongst Aboriginal peoples, and promoting inclusion of this diversity, helps to build relationships of respect and trust. We are committed to being values-driven in everything we do, and to meeting the changing needs of Aboriginal peoples and communities.



## ACTION 6

### Respect an Aboriginal voice.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>6.1</b> Engage the Aboriginal cultural governance framework, its protocols and service principles, drawing Aboriginal perspectives into key business decisions, policies, and program and service developments.	May 2020	Executive Director / Executive Team



## ACTION 7

**Achieve respect and cultural safety through knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal cultures, histories and achievements.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>7.1</b> Identify regional RAP Aboriginal engagement and cultural inclusion champions, who provide cultural consultation for local information and relationships.	June 2020	Deputy Executive Director / Head of ASDU
<b>7.2</b> Co-create an Aboriginal cultural learning strategy and cultural training program supporting regional ownership and delivery.	December 2019	Head of HR Strategy & Capability / Head of ASDU
<b>7.3</b> All new employees to complete onboarding and induction program of Uniting Aboriginal cultural governance model, protocols, and Aboriginal service delivery principles.	June 2021	Head of HR Strategy & Capability / Head of ASDU
<b>7.4</b> All senior executives and board members to undertake cultural learning and immersion activities.	June 2021	Board Chairperson
<b>7.5</b> Over the next two years, 80% of team leaders to undertake cultural experience and learning activities via locally designed cultural appreciation engagement programs.	June 2021	Heads of Service Streams
<b>7.6</b> Over the next two years, 50% of employees to undertake cultural experience and learning activities via locally designed cultural engagement programs.	June 2021	Heads of Service Streams

## ACTION 8

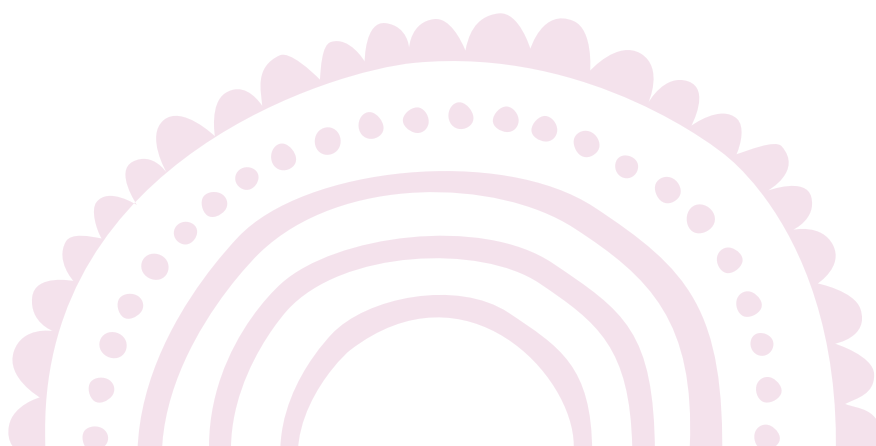
### Celebrate NAIDOC Week.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>8.1</b> Support opportunities through clear HR policies for Aboriginal employees to participate in their own community NAIDOC Week events and activities.	July 2019/20	Director Customer, People & Systems / Head of Employee Experience
<b>8.2</b> In consultation with local Aboriginal engagement and cultural inclusion champions, ensure Uniting sites hold NAIDOC Week activities to celebrate First Peoples, culture and heritage.	July 2019/20	Heads of Service Streams
<b>8.3</b> Support the interests and engagement of the wider Uniting Church congregations to participate in NAIDOC Week.	July 2019/20	Church Engagement Team / Head of ASDU
<b>8.4</b> Share targeted stories via internal communication channels - Yammer and Uniting News - about NAIDOC events and activities.	July 2020/21	Head of Reputation, Digital & News / Head of Internal Communications

## ACTION 9

**Demonstrate respect, safety and inclusion through cultural governance, protocols, advocacy and service principles.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>9.1</b> Establish, implement and communicate Uniting Aboriginal cultural governance, protocols and service delivery principles across the organisation.	June 2020	Head of ASDU / Aboriginal Cultural Governance Circle (ACGC) Members
<b>9.2</b> Develop a list of key contacts for organising a Welcome to Country and maintaining respectful relationships.	June 2020	RAP Engagement & Inclusion Champions
<b>9.3</b> Invite Traditional Owners and Elders to provide a Welcome to Country at significant events each year, including Uniting Board meetings conducted in communities.	June 2020	Heads of Service Streams
<b>9.4</b> Encourage employees and senior leadership to provide an Acknowledgement of Country at other key events and meetings, recognising local historical truths and events of First Australians.	June 2021	Heads of Service Streams
<b>9.5</b> Through established Aboriginal protocols, engage and display key cultural acknowledgements in all operational service centres to convey cultural respect and safety for local clients, employees, visitors and communities.	June 2021	Heads of Service Streams/ RAP Engagement and Inclusion Champions



# Connecting through culture.

**Our Aboriginal youth services team in Dubbo engages with young people facing personal challenges, by connecting them to their cultural identity.**

Cultural Mentors Jamie and Claire McLennan and Adam Wiseman teach traditional skills and practices as they work through a therapeutic process that complements counselling. These cultural camps demonstrate the value of healing through exploration of traditional dances, songs, instruments and tools. The exercise of crafting a bark dish from a tree can be healing in multiple ways – it forges a connection to culture, to nature, and to community.

Jamie explains, “These kids are so proud to be Aboriginal, and they’re yearning to connect. The pride is there and it’s so strong, but what does it mean to be Aboriginal when traditional cultural practices are very rare to come across? We’re teaching these stories and practices so that they can be passed on.”

“

We see working through this cultural lens as a continuation of our living culture, rather than the preservation of a dying culture.

”

**Jamie McLennan**  
Uniting Youth Services  
Dubbo





# Opportunities.

Uniting continues to develop and strengthen its relationships with Aboriginal peoples, organisations and communities, so that mutual opportunities can be identified and explored in responding to circumstances and challenges. We commit to being a great workplace for Aboriginal employees and, as part of the Uniting Church, we are working to confront injustice and break the cycle of disadvantage for First Australians.



## ACTION 10

### Partner with an Aboriginal voice.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>10.1</b> Actively engage an Aboriginal voice in our cultural governance approach to improve service delivery and service practice, ensuring Aboriginal perspectives are engaged and included.	June 2020	Heads of Service Streams
<b>10.2</b> Seek invitation from two communities to co-design a social innovation process and invest in a new community idea for the Future Horizons Aboriginal Families Together initiative.	June 2021	Future Horizons Project Lead / Head of ASDU
<b>10.3</b> Maintain involvement in community sector development through growing connections with current partnered community organisations striving to reach endorsed independent governance and community-managed outcomes.	June 2021	Deputy Executive Director / Head of ASDU
<b>10.4</b> Model a leading partnership and sector development practice for Aboriginal community-controlled enterprises delivering on community and social impact outcomes.	December 2019	Deputy Executive Director / Head of ASDU

## ACTION 11

### Improve and increase Aboriginal recruitment, career paths and professional development.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>11.1</b> Grow Aboriginal employment and careers at Uniting to reflect the people and communities we serve each year, increasing overall workforce profile to 5% by 2021.	June 2021	Executive Team / Director Customer, People & Systems / Recruitment business partners
<b>11.2</b> Each directorate and service stream will develop an Aboriginal workforce plan to attract, recruit, retain and develop Aboriginal career opportunities contributing to overall workforce growth.	July 2019	Executive Team / Service Leaders
<b>11.3</b> Co-design, develop and implement an Aboriginal Employment and Retention Strategy, informed by current workforce data that identifies opportunities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school-based and/or full-time traineeships</li> <li>• cadetships, internships or graduate placements</li> <li>• investment in annual leadership and professional development opportunities.</li> </ul>	July 2020	Head of ASDU / Head of HR Strategy & Capability
<b>11.4</b> Design a model for an Aboriginal recruitment and careers hub resource supporting Aboriginal employment at Uniting.	December 2019	Head of ASDU / Head of HR Strategy & Capability
<b>11.5</b> Review HR, recruitment and advertising policies and procedures, to ensure there are no barriers to Aboriginal employees and future applicants participating in our workplace.	December 2019	Head of HR Strategy & Capability



Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>11.6</b> Collect information on our current Aboriginal employees to inform future employment opportunities.	December 2019	Head of HR Strategy & Capability
<b>11.7</b> Advertise employment vacancies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.	December 2019	Head of HR Strategy & Capability

## ACTION 12

### Incorporate Aboriginal procurement and supplier diversity within our organisation.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>12.1</b> Evaluate, develop and implement an Aboriginal procurement strategy, with ongoing review to ensure there are no barriers to procuring goods and services from Aboriginal businesses.	June 2020	Director Finance & Strategy / Head of Procurement
<b>12.2</b> Promote a list of Aboriginal businesses to our employees, that can be used to procure goods and services.	June 2020	Director Finance & Strategy / Head of Procurement
<b>12.3</b> Identify, grow and develop 12 new commercial relationships with Aboriginal businesses across NSW/ACT.	June 2021	Head of Procurement
<b>12.4</b> Maintain ongoing Supply Nation membership and participation in annual Supply Nation Supplier Connect events.	September 2020	Head of Procurement

# Art with Aboriginal heart.

**Art from the Heart of the Cross is an annual exhibition showcasing the diverse artistic talents of the people who visit the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC).**

Since 2001, this service has provided safe and compassionate care for some of the most marginalised and disenfranchised members of our community, and many of our clients are Aboriginal. This art project gives our clients the opportunity to express themselves and their circumstances creatively and powerfully. The public display and silent auctioning of their work adds a further dimension of empowerment.



**“This exhibition reminds people in the local community that clients who visit the injecting centre are people first and foremost, all with different skills, talents and a story to tell.”**

**Dr Marianne Jauncey**

Medical Director of Uniting MSIC in Sydney

***Family***

Napier

Acrylic on canvas, 2018



# Governance, tracking and reporting.

Governance is fundamental to all our work at Uniting. We are committed to monitoring the implementation of our RAP and identifying areas for improvement along the journey. The support of our Aboriginal Cultural Governance Circle will be crucial in overseeing our actions and informing our progress.

## ACTION 13

Report RAP achievements, challenges and learnings to Reconciliation Australia.

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>13.1</b> RAPWG will drive and report on progress to the Aboriginal Cultural Governance Circle (ACGC), Executive Team and Reconciliation Australia.	September 2019/20	Deputy Executive Director / Head of ASDU / RAPWG
<b>13.2</b> Develop and implement systems and capability needs to track, measure and report on RAP activities to internal and external stakeholders.	September 2019/20	Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU
<b>13.3</b> Report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings to Reconciliation Australia.	September 2019/20	Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU
<b>13.4</b> Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	September 2019/20	Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU
<b>13.5</b> Explore and participate in the RAP Barometer.	May 2020	Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU



## ACTION 14

**Report RAP achievements, challenges and learnings internally and externally.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>14.1</b> Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings.	September 2019/20	Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU
<b>14.2</b> RAPWG will drive and report on progress to the ACGC and Executive Team.	September 2019/20	Deputy Executive Director / Head of ASDU / RAPWG

## ACTION 15

**Review, refresh and update RAP.**

Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>15.1</b> Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.	December 2020	Deputy Executive Director / Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU
<b>15.2</b> Send draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for review and feedback.	January 2021	Deputy Executive Director / Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU
<b>15.3</b> Submit new RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal endorsement.	May 2021	Deputy Executive Director / Chair RAPWG / Head of ASDU

# Hope and growth starts at home.

**Many of our Uniting aged care homes have heart-warming stories of connection to local Aboriginal culture.**

To share just a few examples, Uniting Mirinjani Weston, in the ACT, regularly connects with members of Canberra's Aboriginal Tent Embassy, while residents of Uniting Carroona Kalina Goonellabah on the NSW north coast, and Uniting Elanora in Shellharbour, engage in respectful ways to acknowledge the Aboriginal land they live on, and the Aboriginal members of their local communities.

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy is home to activists representing the political rights of Aboriginal Australians. Signs and tents have sat on the lawn opposite Old Parliament House since 1972. A few years ago, a busload of Mirinjani residents were travelling through Canberra, and stopped to chat with the Tent Embassy residents, who rarely accept visitors. An immediate rapport was struck, and within an hour the elderly Uniting residents were invited to return for a National Reconciliation Week morning tea. The friendship continues and several Tent Embassy residents now visit the aged care home every year to share a cuppa and conduct ceremonies.

In July 2018, Uniting Carroona Kalina invited Aunty Rev. Dorothy Gordon and Gilbert Laurie to raise the Aboriginal flag on the Bundjalung land, and to welcome everyone in language, in celebration of NAIDOC Week. Gilbert and Aunty Dorrie shared how important it was to have the place recognised as Aboriginal land. Traditional song and dance followed, then the fellowship continued with stories over a communal lunch.

Similarly, Uniting Elanora residents, family, employees, volunteers and visitors celebrated NAIDOC Week 2018 with a rock painting art class facilitated by Aboriginal artist Lani Balzan and local Elder Aunty May Button. This tradition has continued for four years, with Lani previously creating Aboriginal murals and paintings to decorate the aged care home. Last year's rock garden project represents union for the community. By painting a rock and placing it in the communal rock garden, participants showed their respect for everyone's uniqueness, and their willingness to live and work together in harmony.



# Last word with Uncle Ray.



**In this, the International Year of Indigenous Languages, we recall an earlier discussion with Uncle Ray McMinn, asking him about the importance of the spoken word in Aboriginal culture.**

He highlighted the essential role languages play in preserving cultural identity, linking Aboriginal people to their land and water, and in communicating history, spirituality and traditional rites.

## **How many Aboriginal languages are there, and how many have we lost?**

There are around 270 Aboriginal languages in use today - less than half of the more than 600 that once existed.

## **Are any of the existing Aboriginal languages in decline?**

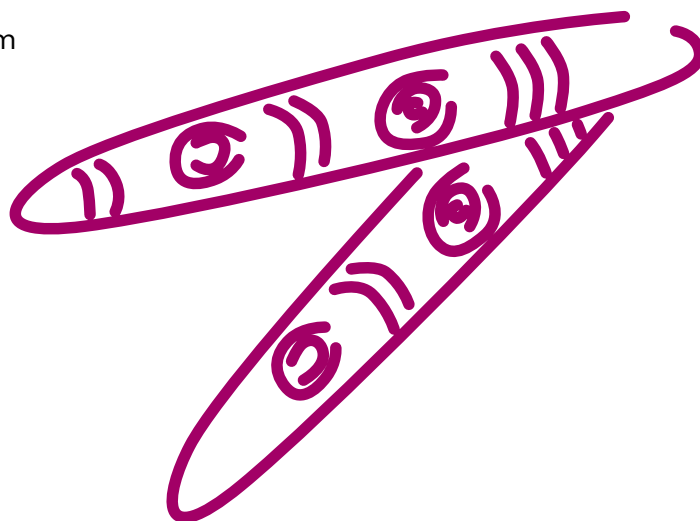
Thankfully, the decline has levelled off with Australia's recognition that we need to restore and retain what we have left. Now there are government grants available to fund research and documentation of Aboriginal languages. This is especially important given that our languages were traditionally passed down from generation to generation in spoken form only.

## **What are the benefits of learning traditional languages, apart from cultural appreciation and preservation?**

Research has shown that young Aboriginal people who are learning their traditional language alongside English are achieving better results in their other studies than those who are not.

## **What is Uniting doing to help preserve traditional languages?**

At Uniting, we work closely with local Aboriginal communities and we are inclusive of local knowledge and language wherever possible. We actively use the local languages to name things and we embrace their resurgence.



# The journey of hope and growth continues.

Through the commitments outlined in our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan, Uniting is uniquely positioned to effect change and social justice for Aboriginal peoples, with the delivery of employment, partnerships and programs.

Uniting is excited to move forward with this RAP, recognising that it's not only a plan, it's also a process, and it will evolve over time.

We acknowledge the participation and dedication of everyone involved in the RAP process, and everyone who champions its delivery. We extend special thanks to our Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group members, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, for your insights and collaboration. Together, we act for positive impact.

If you have any questions or comments about the Uniting Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan, send us an email at:

**[reconciliation@uniting.org](mailto:reconciliation@uniting.org)**

Call us to find out about the services and programs we provide for our Aboriginal clients and communities. We're here to help.

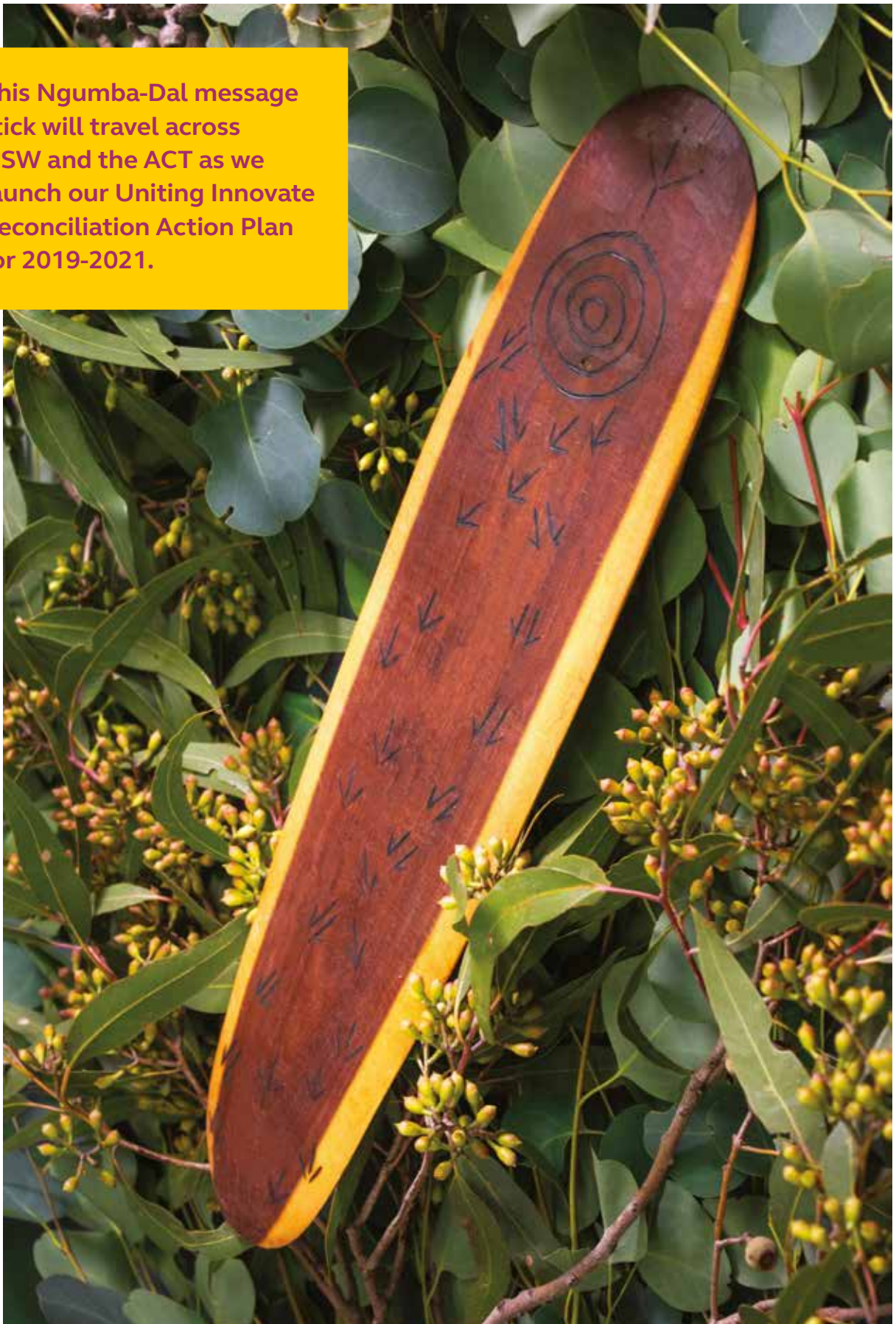
## **Get in touch**

1800 864 846  
[ask@uniting.org](mailto:ask@uniting.org)  
[uniting.org](http://uniting.org)





This Ngumba-Dal message stick will travel across NSW and the ACT as we launch our Uniting Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan for 2019-2021.



**Thank you to our contributing artists**

Commissioned artwork and graphic design by Charmaine Mumbulla.  
Rock garden photo by Roslyn Richardson.  
Illustrations by Saretta Fielding.  
Message stick by Stuart McMinn.





**Uniting**