

Progress on our Reconciliation Action Plan – 2015-16



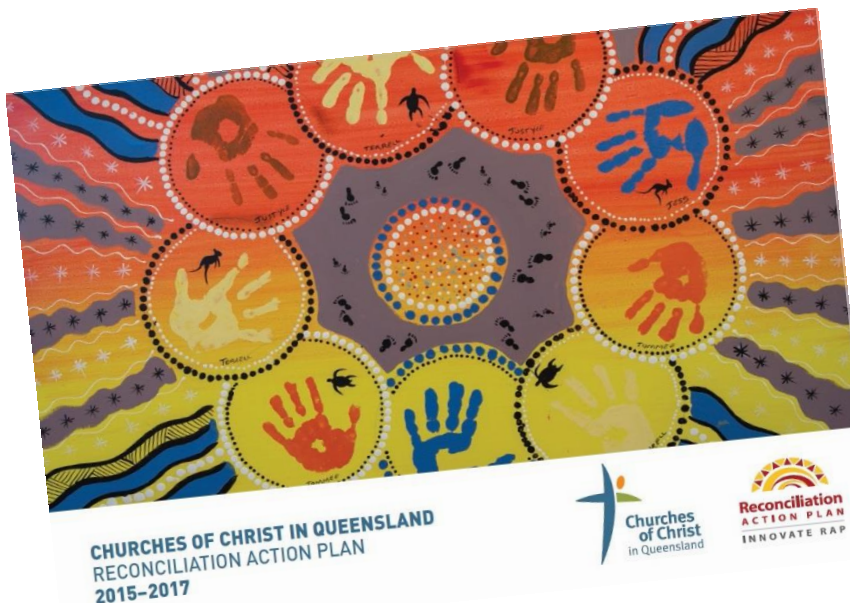
Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was launched on 25 August 2015.

Our RAP contains a range of practical activities to build stronger relationships and greater respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

The RAP sits alongside our strategic plan, is endorsed by Reconciliation Australia, and forms a public commitment to improving the way we engage and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as clients, colleagues and in communities.

Churches of Christ in Queensland's mission is bringing the light of Christ into communities. During our journey of reconciliation we will guide our staff and volunteers, encouraging them to develop friendships, share culture, and live and work together in compassionate communities.

In time, we are committed to becoming a great place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to work, and an organisation that supports local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and like-minded organisations.



The Reconciliation Action Plan was launched at events at Townsville, Mitchelton and Springwood

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Relationships

Partnerships

In the past 12 months, Churches of Christ in Queensland has formed and maintained eight formal and three informal partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Our formal partnerships within our Children, Youth and Families services in Caboolture, Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Mackay, Townsville and South West Queensland include recognised entities, cultural groups, local Indigenous health services and Indigenous youth services.

Participation

We celebrated National Reconciliation Week across the organisation. Events were promoted to all staff and volunteers via direct emails, team briefs and links to resources.

Our Communications team also released information on our National Reconciliation Week activities through media releases, social media and our Networking magazine.

In the past 12 months, we have raised awareness of our RAP through a state-wide targeted communication strategy. This included:

- staff Team Briefs
- all staff emails
- website and social media platforms
- publications
- Annual Report
- Annual General Meeting

- launch events
- Networking articles
- events
- conferences
- correspondence with key partners and government representatives
- people and communities with whom we work.

Respect

Over the past year, 133 staff have undertaken cultural awareness training.

Additionally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures have been celebrated within our workplace. For example, when we were recertified in the Sanctuary model, our Townsville regional office partnered with the local Indigenous community to promote culture using dance, ceremony and storytelling to share the experiences, history, culture and trauma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

We use the Sanctuary model to provide trauma-informed services within our Children, Youth and Families services. During the certification process, certifiers were overwhelmed by the cultural experience and support from our staff. We are now refining the Sanctuary model to include cultural recognition, cultural strength and an understanding of cultural trauma and the impact on families.

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Mareeba community development process

In 2011, 1,238 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived in Mareeba, North Queensland. This represented 16.3 per cent of the total resident population. The Mareeba community approached Churches of Christ in Queensland for assistance and support to address critical issues of overcrowding and high levels of unemployment affecting the safety and wellbeing of their children.

Research identified:

- the majority of Indigenous people in the Mareeba community live in low-income families
- the average household comprises 17 people
- Indigenous children are currently over-represented in the child protection system at 40 per cent.

The Mareeba community provided some context to these statistics, including:

- very limited opportunities for employment in the region
- complete reliance on social housing
- significant barriers to accessing the mainstream rental market
- families need improved support to care for and protect their children.

Building relationships

We have now been working with the Mareeba community for 12 months empowering community leaders, and learning from them, through regular and genuine engagement. We have developed respectful relationships between the community, our church representatives and staff. A round-table discussion was held and community leaders identified their strengths and aspirations. A partnership agreement will now be developed to create a Mareeba Reconciliation Plan and/or a Community Safety Plan focused on children, families, housing and employment. This will bring all the government and non-government sector and communities together to work towards a common goal.

Opportunities

Employment

We are committed to recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we have a target of 3.5 per cent employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. To date, we have increased the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff from 59 to 73.

We anticipate this number will grow as we continue trialling Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Community Engagement Officer positions across our Children, Youth and Families services.

We are also developing on-the-job training and career development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, plus new human resources processes and procedures that will support and enhance our organisation as a preferred place of employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses

In the 2015-16 financial year, Churches of Christ in Queensland procured \$1.3M worth of goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, including those accredited by Supply Nation.

We have sought opportunities to provide pro-bono services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations or communities and we will continue to seek opportunities to share our services with those most in need.

Delivering on our RAP commitments, our procurement team has actively promoted reconciliation while raising awareness.

The team has developed a questionnaire to source and evaluate potential suppliers' commitment to reconciliation.

After reviewing our RAP, one potential supplier has sought assistance to develop their own RAP to understand the effectiveness of improved relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and businesses.

Children and Youth Centre for Learning and Employment

Children and young people in out of home care are highly vulnerable to lower levels of developmental, mental health and educational outcomes. When transitioning to independence, future expectations for young people are also poor. On average, young people leaving our out-of-home care have lower levels of employment and lower average income than their peers.

Churches of Christ Care developed the Children and Youth Centre for Learning and Employment (CYCLE) program to support successful outcomes for young people, including positive educational and employment outcomes.

The program addresses the educational and developmental needs of each individual young person. The goal is to support increased levels of literacy and numeracy and to address educational gaps so young people can return to fulltime, mainstream education if appropriate and/or seek paid employment.

During the reporting period we had six young people aged 13 to 16 years who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participating in the CYCLE program. This number fluctuates throughout the year due to young people's personal circumstances or other commitments.

We are adopting an organisational approach to integrate child protection and education responses that prioritise the needs of individual young people while creating opportunities for change.