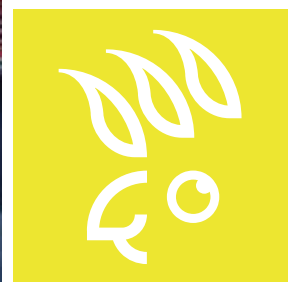




RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

REFLECT

connect
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES



Reflect Reconciliation
Action Plan
July 2020 to June 2021

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our services operate: the Gundungurra and Darug Nations.

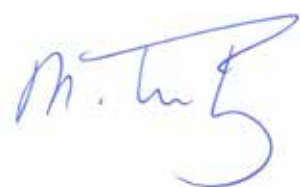
Message from our Chief Executive Officer

I am very proud to present Connects first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) both as the leader of the organisation and as an everyday Australian who truly believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures are vitally important to the social fabric of this country and to our progress as a developing nation.

For many years Connect has demonstrated its commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through its services and programs and our teams regularly tell us about further improvements that we can be making to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in all that we do. The process of developing our “Reflect” RAP has been a great opportunity to look back at those previous undertakings but also to plan for what Connect can contribute to genuine and impactful reconciliation within our communities in the future.

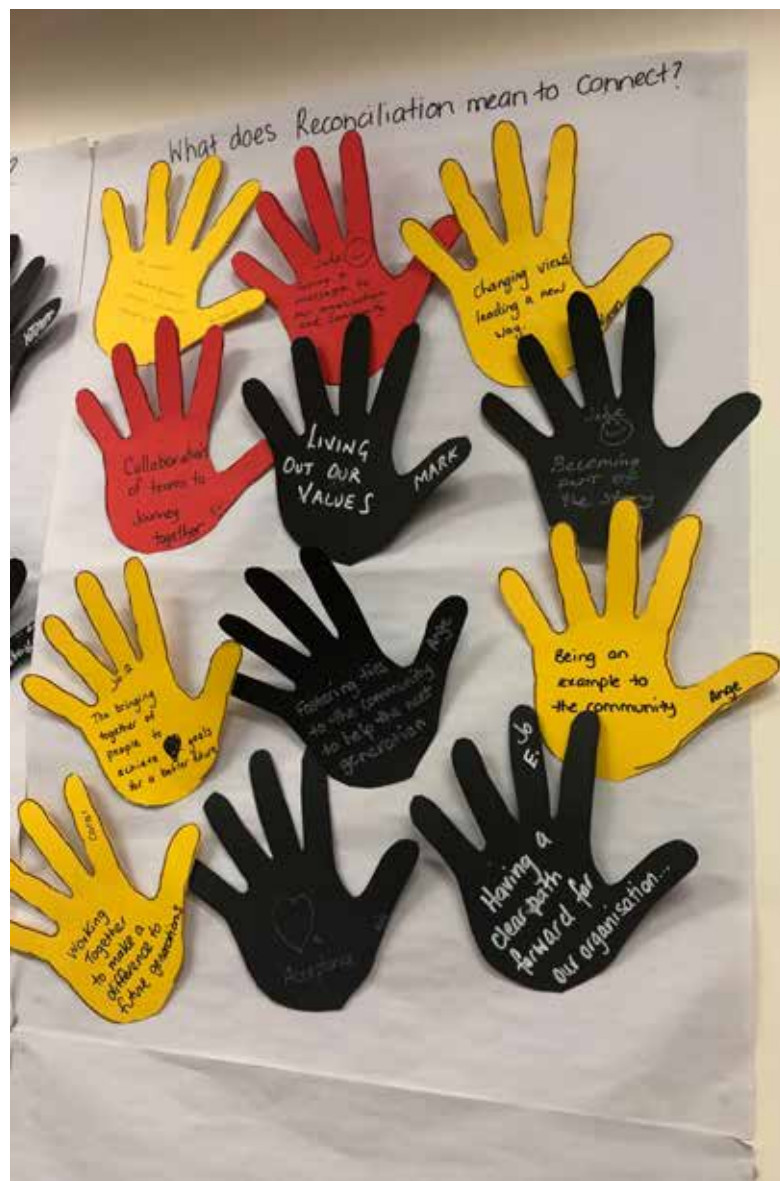
I am very grateful to Dr Lana Leslie-Henfling, Winangay Consulting, who has guided Connect through the development of the RAP. Lana’s knowledge and experience has increased our understanding of what true reconciliation means but importantly Lana has modelled how a spirit of reconciliation can be lived out for the benefit of all those people around us, each and every day.

I am looking forward to the implementation of our plan over the next twelve months knowing that Connect will be a stronger organisation for the communities it serves as it plays a more active and accountable role in its relationship with our First Nation peoples.



Mark Turley

CEO November 2019



Our Business

Connect Child and Family Services Ltd (Connect) is a not-for-profit organisation helping families nurture and educate their children aged 0 to 12 years. Located on Darug Country, New South Wales, we serve communities in the Blue Mountains, Lithgow, Nepean, Hawkesbury and Western Sydney areas. We are committed to practising our three key values being; active partnership with families; the best professional thinking; and growth in every child. The question we at Connect ask ourselves each day is:

Is each child happier, does each parent or carer feel more confident, for having spent time with us?

Connect provides Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ECEC) and community-based family support programs. Our family support programs include community based play groups, transition to school programs, volunteer-based parent and carer support programs and trauma informed play therapy programs; National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Medicare funded disability and allied health care and programs; and 4 early childhood education and care centres one in Mount Victoria (Possums Patch), two in Hazelbrook (Possum and Hazelwood) and one in Lapstone (Lapstone Pre-School) in the Blue Mountains.

Formed in 1981, we are committed to overcoming barriers to a child's development, their transition into school and into community life. Each year over 1600 children, from over 1200 families directly access our programs across the Sydney Metropolitan West areas. These families are supported by a highly skilled workforce of early childhood educators, allied health and community support specialists.

Connect employs 115 staff, including 88 permanent staff (54 full time equivalent) and 27 casual staff. We employ two Aboriginal educators nested in our ECEC services and one Aboriginal mentor with the Little Possums Program.



Our Reconciliation Action Plan 2020

Since inception in 1981, Connect has worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in various ways including cultural awareness training in schools, play therapy programs and cultural activities involving local Elders and dancers. While this work has been beneficial at service level, there has not been a corporate approach to reconciliation within the organisation. Our Strategic Plan 2019-2022 reflects our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that includes the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan.

The development of the RAP began in 2018 following the Early Childhood Australia Reconciliation Symposium. Two Early Childhood Directors attended the symposium and commenced development on the RAP from an early childhood perspective. This early work was expanded to all services in May 2019, during National Reconciliation Week, when Dr Lana Leslie-Henfling (Winangay Consulting) offered to assist Connect develop a whole of organisation RAP.

Seven information sessions for Connect staff were held from 18 to 27 June, 2019. The duration of the sessions was approximately one hour and included information about reconciliation, reconciliation action plans and the reasons Connect were doing a RAP. The sessions also sought volunteers to join the Connect RAP Working Group.

In the development stage, the Working Group met to participate in four meetings from 11 July to 17 October,

2019. Information gathered from the meetings informed the development of the RAP. Once this process was complete, the RAP was finalised and submitted to Reconciliation Australia for review and endorsement.

In the forthcoming implementation stage, the Working Group will meet regularly to put into practice the intended plan. Actions and deliverables will be monitored against the timelines previously set.

Mark Turley, the Chief Executive Officer at Connect champions and supports the development and monitoring of the RAP through his role.

The Working Group consists of the following members:

- Mark Turley, Chief Executive Officer, Co-Coordinator of Working Group
- Dr Lana Leslie-Henfling, Winangay Consulting, Co-Coordinator of Working Group
- Elizabeth Smith, Administrative Services Manager
- Jo Roe, Early Childhood Teacher at Lapstone Preschool
- Karen Hall, Educator at Lapstone Preschool
- Kim Martin, Community Services Operation Manager
- Angela Gillespie, Early Childhood Services Operations Manager
- Jo Everingham, Program Manager, Western Sydney Transition to School Manager
- Jake Small, Educator at Possum's Patch Mt Victoria
- Coral Glass, Educator at Hazelwood Early Childhood Education and Care
- Kathie O'Connor, Play Therapist



Our Partnerships and Current Activities

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

NGALLU WAL ABORIGINAL AND CHILD FAMILY CENTRE

Connect provides the Little Possums school holiday program in partnership with Ngallu Wal (meaning 'We care' in Darug) Aboriginal and Child Family Centre located at 259 Kildare Road, Doonside. The program provides an informal and culturally safe space where Aboriginal families and children enjoy various activities and the opportunity to connect with each other. Activities include art and craft experiences, face painting, cultural art experiences with free play, opportunities for discussion with children and carers together and individually, activities involving gross motor experiences for example cricket and tennis, as well as a barbecue lunch.

ABORIGINAL TRANSITION TO SCHOOL NETWORK

Connect provides leadership and a safe environment for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations to collaborate to create practical strategies that ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal children transitioning into primary school. The organisations include local Aboriginal organisations Ngallu Wal Aboriginal and Child Family Centre, Yenu Allowah Aboriginal Child and Family Centre and Ngroo Education Inc and non-Aboriginal organisations, Public Schools, Non-Government services and early education Government services. Meeting twice every school term, the organisations learn from each other and produce positive outcomes that include collaborative resources like Kids 'n' Traffic 'Safe journeys with Yuluwirri Kids' and the Connect 'Little Possums' play therapy/mentor group.

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICERS FROM THE NEW SOUTH WALES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Since 2012, Connect has worked in partnership with Aboriginal Education Officers from public schools in Willmot, Doonside, Crawford, Tregear, Whalan and Lethbridge Park (0 to 5 years playgroup) located in Western Sydney to ensure Aboriginal children and families are welcomed and actively supported in their transition to school. This partnership is enabled through our Transition to School Programs that are delivered weekly over one or two terms in the year before school. Connect works alongside Aboriginal Education Officers to support individual children and families by using a strengths approach to assist children to: become familiar with the school environment; to assist with building a routine; and to cement a positive relationship with Aboriginal Education Officers and other school staff. This approach provides an ongoing opportunity to share ideas, perspectives, understanding and broadly reconciliation in our work and our schools.

WINANGAY CONSULTING

Winangay Consulting is an Aboriginal Consulting business owned by Kamilaroi woman Dr Lana Leslie-Henfling based in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales. Winangay Consulting provides services in the development and implementation of Reconciliation Action Plans, project management, professional development courses, cultural mentoring, development of policy and procedures, cultural practice frameworks and research. Connect has a working relationship with Dr Leslie-Henfling whom we have engaged to co-ordinate the development of the Reconciliation Action Plan.



Internal Activities/Initiatives

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PERSPECTIVES EMBEDDED WITHIN OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Our services are committed to authentically embedding the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is done in several ways for example we have regular incursions that involve visits to our services from Darug Elders, Darug peoples and other Aboriginal peoples and organisations. Some of our visitors include Jacinta Tobin, a Darug woman who developed and implemented the 'Get down and Darug' music and sing-a-long resource that is used extensively within our services. Songs from 'Get down and Darug' were performed by our children at various times such as Connect's Annual General Meeting. Other visitors to our centres include the Wagana Aboriginal Dancers who introduced our children to traditional and contemporary dances inspired by the Blue Mountains and NSW Central West as part of NAIDOC Week in 2019; and Young Australia Workshop who provide stories, legends, music and art. Local Elders also visit our services to conduct storytelling activities with our children.

Our centres utilise a wide variety of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning and teaching resources and teaching guides from various sources such as Early Childhood Australia, NAIDOC and Reconciliation Australia. Specific resources include using the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander map for activities; using Darug language as part of the daily routine with our children through key words and songs; using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dolls; displaying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags alongside the Australian Flag; and activities such as creating a mural of Red Hands Cave (near Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains that shows layers of hand prints and stencils believed to have been painted between 500 and 1600 years ago).

In 2018, Lapstone Pre-School created a Bush Tucker Garden with Muru Mittigar Cultural & Education Centre, a Western Sydney organisation that provide services to support Darug people and the wider Aboriginal community. This initiative was made possible with funding from Sydney Water. In 2019 this activity was developed further with the creation of 'friendship stones' that were laid in the garden by the pre-school children.

FUNDRAISING

A fundraiser was held for Bubup Wilam (meaning 'Children's Place' in Woi Wurrung) for Early Learning Aboriginal and Family Centre located at Thomastown, Whittlesea, Melbourne, Victoria. Bubup Wilam for early learning provides Aboriginal children, families and the community with access to an integrated range of services of programs, early years education, and health and wellbeing services. The fundraiser included cakes and treats that were made by the Possum families and sold to raise funds. Funds were sent to Bubup Wilam and as a result, ongoing communication has been initiated between the two services and the children.

EVENTS CELEBRATING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES AND CULTURES

Connect ensures that every National Reconciliation Week (NRW) and NAIDOC Week are both celebrated each year. In NAIDOC Week 2019, Connect celebrated the theme 'Voice, Treaty, Truth' by using various resources to teach Children about the theme. In particular, the theme of 'Treaty' was introduced to the Children utilising conversations around inviting people to your house.

In National Reconciliation Week 2019, various activities were held across different services. At Lapstone Pre-School, a notable activity involved Connect organising approximately 20 parents and their Children to walk to Red Hands Cave. The walk included an activity where the Children painted calico bags with their hands and designs to use by their families as reusable shopping bags. In addition, the meaning of reconciliation was discussed with the Children. This included reading and discussing a selection of storybooks authored by Aboriginal peoples.







LITTLE POSSUMS

The Little Possums is a child-centered trauma informed therapeutic approach. It aims to work holistically with Aboriginal children and their families. The play and expressive therapist works directly with the children in a room that is set up for children to support their exploration and free expression of feelings, thoughts, worries and concerns. This often happens in a symbolic way as we use play and expressive methods like art, drama and music to support children work through emotional difficulties.

Work with parents is integral to the success of the approach. Children's progress and support needs are discussed with the parents, involving them in the process of change, helping them understand their children's struggles. An Aboriginal mentor directly supports the parents with regular phone calls, meetings at the school and community support. The mentor also connects with the Aboriginal education officers within the schools to support the families and children.

CREATING CULTURALLY SAFE AND WELCOMING PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

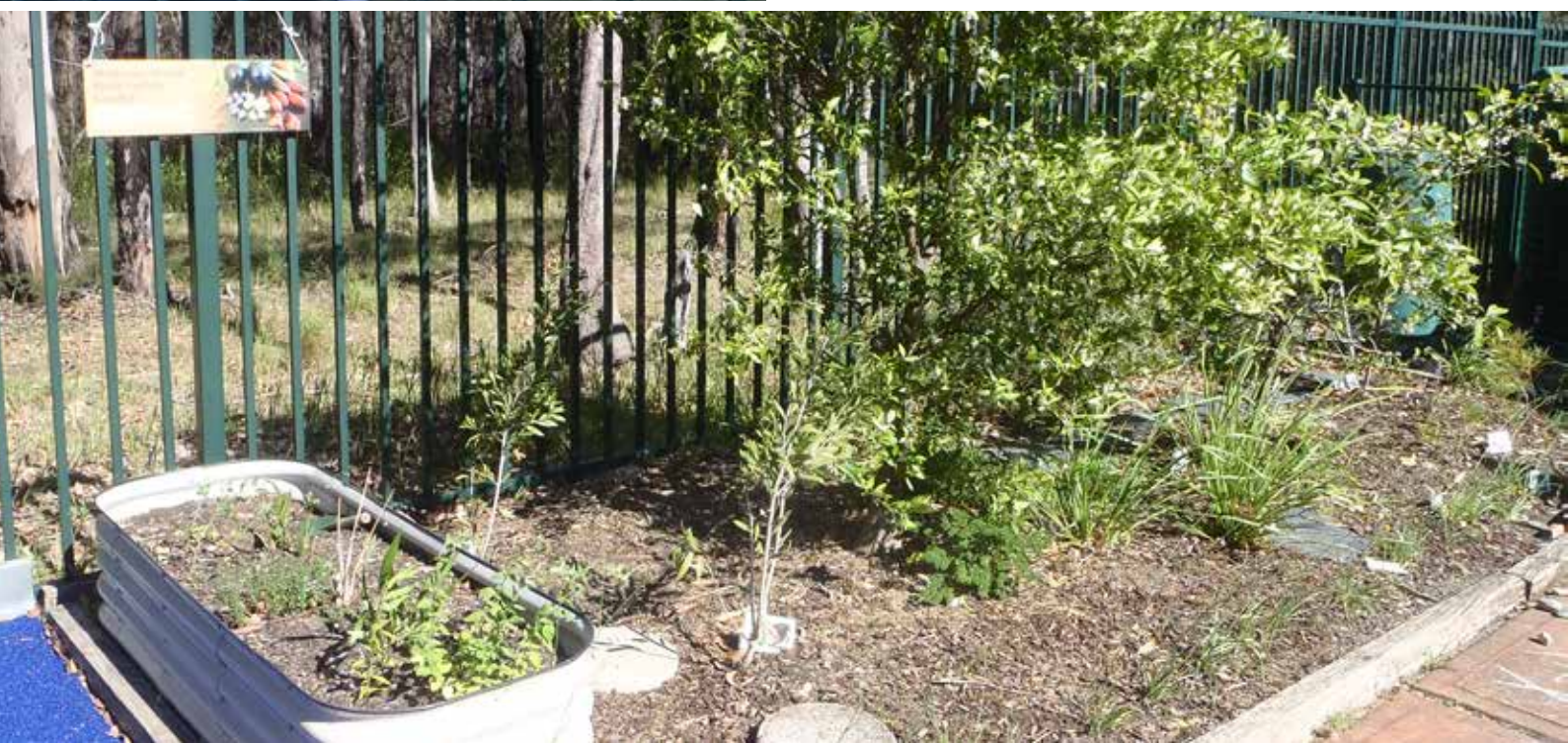
We believe that an Acknowledgement of Country provides a critical platform for both children and adults to build and share their understandings of our First Peoples. In 2016, Possum ECEC consulted with a local Darug woman to develop the wording for the Acknowledgement of Country. Since that time, it has been spoken every morning at our Possum Service.

Lapstone Preschool has developed an interactive Acknowledgement of Country as follows:

We thank the Darug and Gundungurra people for the land on which we learn and play (we put our hands on the land). We pay our respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging (we put our hands up in the air and for the last part on our hearts and at this point one of the children will add 'emerging means coming out').

The Acknowledgement of Country is also displayed on signs at the front door of each of our services.

In each of our services are wall hangings and pictures for example in Hazelbrook, each room is named by different animals: Kookaburras, White Cockatoos, Black Cockatoos. These were created by our children with the assistance with local Elders.



CULTURAL EDUCATION

Connect have a range of cultural education opportunities for staff that build and extend their professional and personal understandings and connections to the Aboriginal community. This includes formal training experiences where selected staff attend the Early Childhood Australia Reconciliation Symposium and Aboriginal Early Childhood Conference and informal opportunities to build relationships and reflect on program and individual practices.

In 2019, the annual staff survey included for the first time two parts that related to the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures within the organisation. The first part asked staff to respond, from a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to the following statement: 'I am aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture being included in our program'. Table 1 highlights the responses.

It is heartening that 80% of those responded were either agreed or strongly agreed that they were aware of the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures in our program. While this is positive, we will continue to strive to make this 100% across our organisation.



The second part asked staff to respond to the following question: 'What could we do to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures in our organisation?' Forty-five responses indicated a wide range of ideas. To give some examples, some respondents were confident the development and implementation of the RAP would assist Connect:

'I think the RAP process is a great way to begin' (#21)

'I think the RAP will bring forward a lot of individual, organisation ideas and momentum' (#3)

'Continue to develop the RAP and implement and review' (#14)

'We already include and cater for the needs however the development of our RAP will make a fundamental impact in our org' (#44)

Other responses included the need for more Aboriginal staff and volunteers, professional development, more incursions and excursions, more resources (including posters, banners, dissemination of information, financial), celebrating significant events, embedding of Aboriginal perspectives, observing cultural protocols. Of note were several comments that suggested more involvement and ways to build relationships with local Aboriginal Elders, families and communities in the Blue Mountains.

Overall the responses were very positive and offered ideas and reinforced the work that is currently being undertaken in inclusion activities across the organisation. It is intended that the same two questions be asked in staff surveys into the future, to enable comparisons and to monitor changes. In the meantime, the responses are beneficial for current and future inclusion practices across the organisation.

Table 1: Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture inclusion in our program

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I am aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture being included in our program	0 (0%)	4 (8%)	6 (12%)	20 (41%)	19 (39%)	49

Over the next 12 months (July 2020 to June 2021) Connect commits to the following actions and deliverables:



RELATIONSHIPS

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.	September, 2020	Community Services Operation Manager
	Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	September, 2020	Early Childhood Services Operations Manager
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.	April, 2021	Administrative Services Manager
	RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.	27 May to 3 June, 2021	Administrative Services Manager
	Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	27 May to 3 June, 2021	Chief Executive Officer
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff.	Monthly (July 2020 to June, 2021)	Western Sydney Transition to School Manager
	Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.	August, 2020	Chief Executive Officer
	Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.	August, 2020	Early Childhood Services Operations Manager
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.	July, 2020	Administrative Services Manager
	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.	July, 2020	Administrative Services Manager



RESPECT

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation.	March, 2021	Chief Executive Officer
	Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	March, 2021	Human Resources Manager
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.	February, 2021	Early Childhood Services Operations Manager
	Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols	February, 2021	Centre Director, Hazelwood
7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week.	July, 2020	Western Sydney Transition To School Manager
	Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area.	July, 2020	Western Sydney Transition To School Manager
	RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.	5 to 12 July, 2020	Western Sydney Transition To School Manager
8. Celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local stories/achievements.	Develop and promote an internal Storypark campaign with families and staff to highlight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local stories and achievements	April, 2021	Early Childhood Services Operations Manager



OPPORTUNITIES

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
9. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation.	February, 2021	Chief Executive Officer
	Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	February, 2021	Centre Director, Hazelwood
10. Investigate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	Develop a business case for procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.	September, 2020	Play Therapist
	Investigate Supply Nation membership	September, 2020	Centre Director, Hazelwood
11. Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff's professional development opportunities.	Investigate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership programs and determine suitability for relevant staff to attend.	April, 2021	Human Resources Manager
12. Promote practices that reflect reconciliation	Conduct a workshop with RAP Working Group members to create a reconciliation practice framework that outlines the practical strategies staff can apply	December, 2020	Community Services Operation Manager



GOVERNANCE AND TRACKING PROGRESS

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
13. Maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	Maintain a RWG to govern RAP implementation.	July, 2020	Chief Executive Officer
	Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG.	July, 2020	Chief Executive Officer
	Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG.	July, 2020	Chief Executive Officer
14. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	Define resource needs for RAP implementation.	August, 2020	Chief Executive Officer
	Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	Monthly (July 2020 to June, 2021)	Chief Executive Officer
	Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	August, 2020	Chief Executive Officer
15. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	September, 2020	Chief Executive Officer
16. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	February, 2021	Chief Executive Officer



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