



Believing In
Children,
Young People,
Families &
Their Future.

Berry Street

Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan Report 2

November 2021



Berry Street acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, skies and waterways across Australia. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge Elders as the holders and protectors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. We pay respect to emerging Elders to come and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in our care to connect to their countries, cultures and communities.

Reconciliation Action Plan Implementation July-November

Throughout the implementation of Berry Street's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), the organisation has reached many significant milestones. During this time, our staff embraced key projects outlined in the strategic document with warmth, willingness to learn and eagerness to support reconciliation as an organisation and country.

Earlier in the year, we provided a progress report to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and staff, capturing our reconciliation journey throughout November 2020- June 2021. You can access the report [here](#).

Since then, Berry Street has successfully completed 47/47 deliverables outlined in the RAP. We are at the end of our Reflect RAP journey and acknowledge the many portfolios, teams and staff across the organisation who have contributed to this. We are mindful that staff are at different stages of their reconciliation journey, however, know it is important to embrace this journey as a collective, paving the way for a better and brighter future at Berry Street.

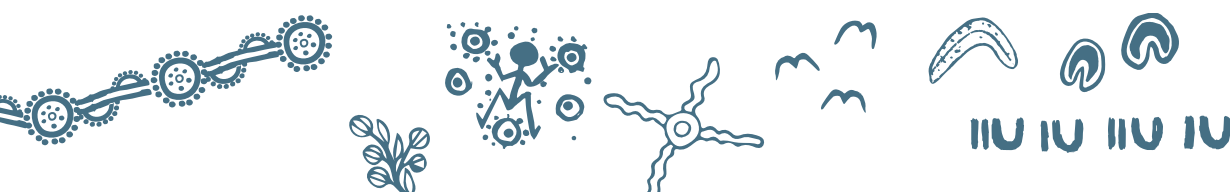
Throughout implementation, staff recognised that they might not always get it right, however, engaged in projects with open hearts and open minds, feeling privileged to learn and work alongside the longest living continuous culture in the world.

This month, we asked our colleagues about their reconciliation experience, here's what they had to say:

"I'm proud of the progress Berry Street has made towards reconciliation in the last 12 months but acknowledge this is an ongoing journey that the organisation is committed to"

"Since my appointment in 2019, the importance of cultural safety and genuine commitment to reconciliation was deeply seeded and felt across the organisational leadership team"

"The efforts of Berry Street Education Model to integrate reconciliation in our heads, hearts and hands through our daily work has been motivated at every step by the Reconciliation Action Plan."



“Super proud to see more language, makes my heart warm”

“The opportunity to learn with and contribute to the Walking Together Group, and work closely with our *cultural lead, colleagues and clients in culturally responsive ways, has been a transformative experience.*”

“Being part of the Reflect RAP journey has been incredibly humbling, eye-opening and revolutionary. As a non-Aboriginal migrant woman, I acknowledge that I also have a part to play in reconciliation. It starts with open and authentic dialogue, to develop a shared understanding of our history, culture, identity, spirituality, pain and healing. To truly blossom as an organisation and nation, we need to honour, respect and lead by action to strive and create real change.”

A message from our CEO:


It is with great pride that I share the success of the organisation’s Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan. Completing 47 projects outlined in the RAP within a 12-month time frame is an achievement we can all be proud of.

Embracing Reconciliation Australia’s RAP program, we have spent time understanding how our programs support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, reflected on our reconciliation maturity, exploring who we are, and who we want to be as an organisation.

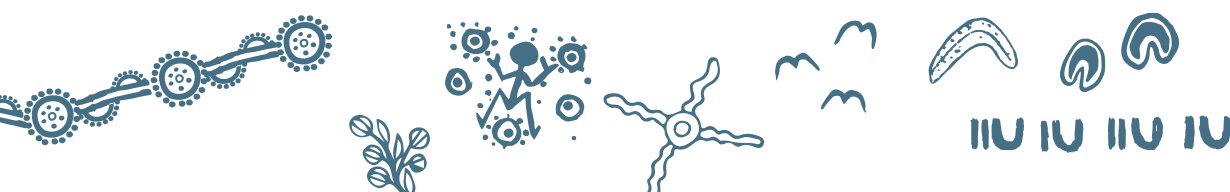
In addition to our achievements outlined in the document, projects emerged through the spirit and commitment of our teams, supporting key themes that underpin our Reflect RAP. It has been incredible to see how key learnings have translated into reconciliation action.

While we have begun to heal from the past, there is much more work to do. As we move into 2022, we will continue to embrace reconciliation, holding the Reflect RAP values in our hearts and minds, until we launch an Innovate RAP.

CEO



Michael Perusco



Key Projects

Bagung Ngarrgu – Digital Workplace

Bagung Ngarrgu is Woi Wurrung for Gather Knowledge. Wurundjeri Elder, Aunty Gail, from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Aboriginal Heritage Council, generously gifted Berry Street the name for the purpose of the organisation's new digital workplace.

On 14 September Berry Street launched Bagung Ngarrgu. A platform for staff to access resources, training, program information, and organisational updates through articles updated online.



Wurundjeri Elder-Aunty Gail



Wurundjeri Elder-Aunty Di Kerr

Approximately 260 staff members were present for the virtual launch of Bagung Ngarrgu. Aunty Di warmly welcomed staff onto Wurundjeri Country with kindness and unity, offering healing through connection. During the Welcome, Aunty Di's daughter, Melissa Kerr, engaged in a Smoking Ceremony.



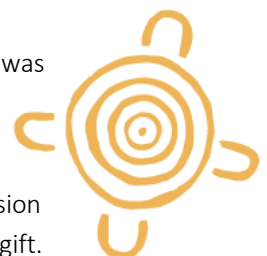
We are grateful for Aunty Di and Melissa Kerr's support with the event. The Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony provided Berry Street with an opportunity to cleanse out all that was before in order to make way for a new energy that embodies reconciliation at its core, reflecting the essence of Bagung Ngarrgu.

Bagung Ngarrgu is an important reconciliation milestone that honours the deep connection between land and language. Berry Street acknowledges the spiritual significance language holds in the minds, bodies and spirits of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are committed to referring to Bagung Ngarrgu with pride. We recognise that this strengthens relationships between the Traditional Custodians of the lands across the nation and the wider population, the very foundation that underpins reconciliation.

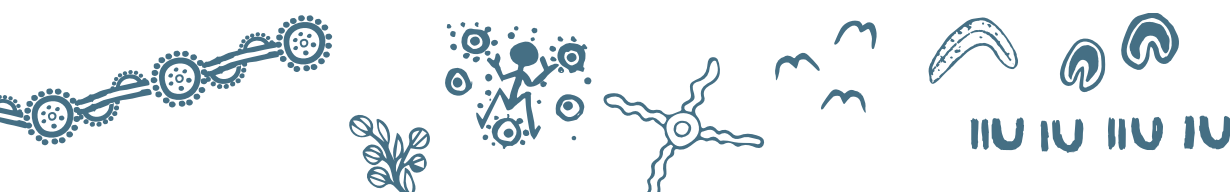
The Bagung Ngarrgu icon

The Bagung Ngarrgu icon, meaning 'gathering', is part of the series 'Elements of Earth', which was created on Gunai Kurnai Country by The Gathering Place's Elder's Art Group and The Koorie Youth Group.

Elements of Earth comes forth from our Reflect RAP. This image has been used with permission from the artists. We are thankful to the Elders Art Group and the Koorie Youth Group for this gift.



Berry Street is proud to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures woven into the fabric of this platform. This includes the name in Woiwurrung language, the icon, along with functions throughout Bagung Ngarrgu. Berry Street will continue to build on this, reflecting our reconciliation maturity as we move through the structures of Reconciliation Australia's RAP program.



Cultural Support Plan Project

The Cultural Support Plan (CSP) project was developed in line with Berry Street's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan. The aim of this deliverable was to undertake authentic reflection and review of current practice, systems and relationships to better understand how we support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in our care. This included reviewing access to connection to cultures, countries and communities through the implementation of Cultural Support Plans.

The Cultural Support Plan project commenced in May 2021 and concluded in September 2021. The project was led by Wiradjuri woman, Sarah Dawson, Berry Street's Senior Manager of Aboriginal Service Development. At the time of the audit, Berry Street supported 205 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples, across multiple programs.

Demographic information was gathered to reflect cultural identity, LGBTIQ+ Identity, distribution by age, people living with disabilities, along with programs accessed by service users.



In total, 263 files were reviewed with deep care, sensitivity and respect. Throughout the audit process, it was imperative to hold the stories of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in the hearts and minds of staff, while exploring how these stories can translate into action.

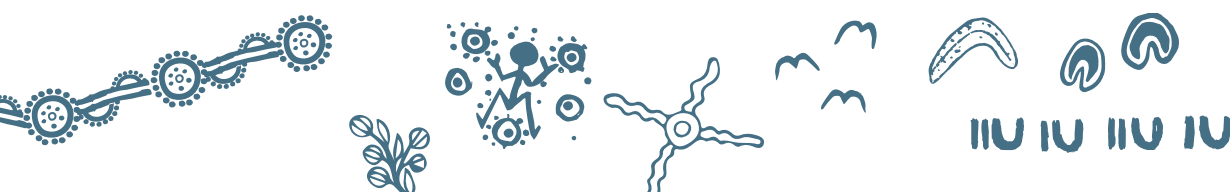
In addition to reviewing files, the project lead met with Regional Directors, the Director Take Two and managers across Berry Street to capture the narrative and experience of staff supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Throughout the review, key themes emerged and were collated to support the development of a quality improvement plan. This quality Improvement plan will also feature in Berry Street's Innovate RAP, as we spend 2022 considering the key

themes arising from the audit and how we can support and equip our staff in their work to connect children and young people to culture and community.

It is important to note that while the Cultural Support Plan project focused on current practice, it also modelled how Berry Street learns from practice of the past. This included being complicit in racist policies such as the 1869 Aborigines Protection Act, that forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their cultures, countries and communities. To read further about our part in this, you can view Berry Street's Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities [here](#).

At Berry Street, we will not shy away from the truth. We will continue to acknowledge our history, engaging in meaningful actions that support healing. Explicitly linking this project to practice of the past, is a clear indicator that the organisation is maturing on its reconciliation journey and is committed to ensuring mistakes are not repeated.



Wungurwil Gagapduir: Carer transfer Committee- Northern Region

In the North, Berry Street co-chairs the Wungurilwil Gagapduir Leadership Group - Carer Transfer Sub-Committee. This committee is comprised of representation from Berry Street, VACCA, Anglicare and MacKillop. This year, the committee developed a resource package for community service organisations (CSOs) that supports potential carers who want to care for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and to register with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations *before* registering with CSOs. This emphasises self-determination and recognises the importance of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people's connection to culture being centre to their care.

The CSOs that represent the committee will pilot the resource pack from November 2021. The pack includes:

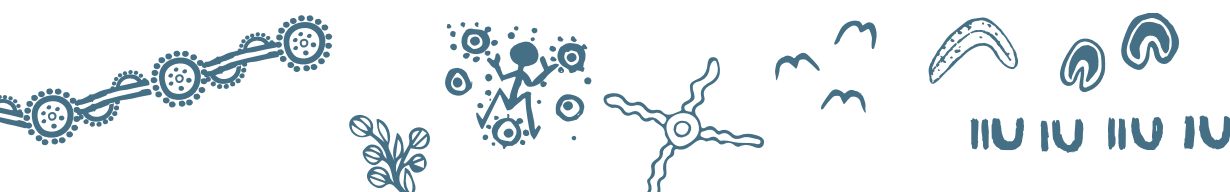
- Written information regarding the importance of carers being supported by Aboriginal Community Controlled Agencies when they care for Aboriginal children
- Bringing them Home Report video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sl82VMuuKl0>
- Merinda's Story '[Connection to Culture provides hope](#)' - YouTube
- Instructions regarding meeting with, and building relationships between, community services organisations and local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation recruitment staff
- A script for community service organisation's recruitment staff to utilise when receiving an enquiry from a potential carer wanting to care for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people



This great initiative underpins key themes outlined in our RAP and is a powerful statement that recognises that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are most equipped to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Cultural COVID response

Throughout the implementation of Berry Street's Cultural COVID Action Plan, the organisation continued to support self-determination by following COVID advice provided by Aboriginal agencies across Australia. This included ensuring community driven COVID information and resources were available on Bagung Ngarrgu. In addition to this, we supported cultural consultation regarding suspected or confirmed cases of COVID for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service users and colleagues.



In support of COVID vaccination, Ashleigh Dalton, from the Gathering Place based on Gunai Kurnai Country, recorded a message, sharing her experience with Aboriginal staff. Ashley is a Traditional Custodian of Gunai Kurnai Country and was hesitant at first to get the vaccine, however, decided it was the choice for her to protect Elders in community. We are thankful to Ashleigh for sharing her experience with staff at Berry Street.



In addition to this, we have uploaded videos from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander General Practitioners and Healthcare professionals on Bagung Ngarrgu and included a list of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations across Victoria that provide COVID vaccinations.

Cultural Safety

Berry Street is committed to providing an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. We know that cultural safety is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together.

Throughout the year, we have explored ways to embed cultural safety through a reconciliation lens. This has included the review of policies and procedures. To action amendments made to the documents, the People & Culture team is working alongside the Aboriginal Service Development portfolio to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures into training modules, supervision and team meeting templates, along with case noting and care team meeting templates.

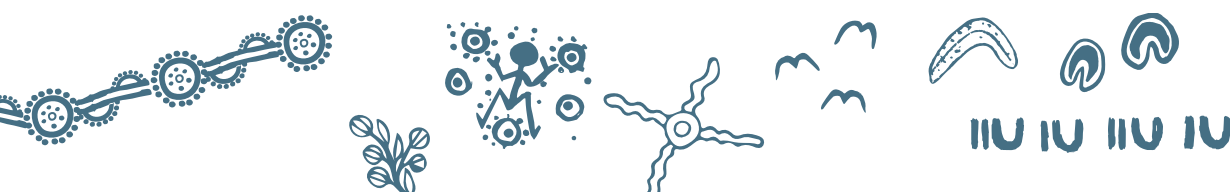
In addition to this, the two portfolios are working closely to support staff recruitment and orientation. This has included promoting and employing Aboriginal staff in identified roles, non-gazetted positions, inviting Aboriginal staff to attend the Walking Together Group and supporting cultural orientation.

Berry Street's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Committee

In November, Berry Street held the organisation's first official Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Committee that focusses on reconciliation. The committee is co-chaired by our Senior Manager of Aboriginal Service Development, Sarah Dawson and Berry Street School teacher, Melissa Suerrier.

On the day, staff members who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, attended the meeting to yarn, get to know each other the Aboriginal way (who's your mob, what country are you from, what country are you on etc), along with exploring what the function of the committee could be. This culturally safe space was well received, and many connections were made throughout the meeting.

Next, the committee will regroup in January 2022 to discuss a terms of reference. This group is open only to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members.



Narragunnawali RAP launch – The Berry Street School



On 14 November, the Berry Street School launched their first [Narragunnawali Reconciliation Action Plan \(RAP\)](#) with deep commitment and pride. Staff, students, families and community members based on Yorta Yorta, Boon Wurrung, Gunai Kurnai and Wadawurrung Country, joined online to celebrate this momentous occasion.

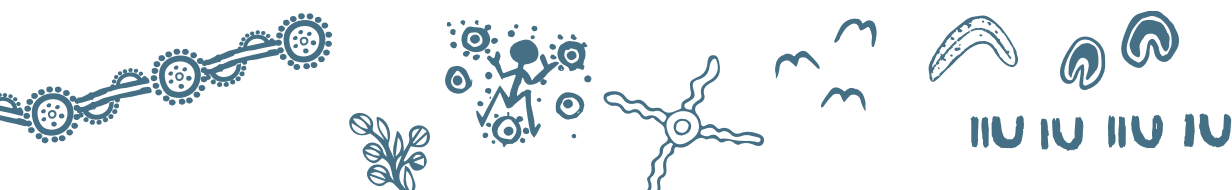
To commence the event, Aunty Janet from the Boon Wurrung Foundation provided a warm Welcome to Country, sharing Bunjil, the creator's story. Following this, student

leaders across the School led the event. Each campus provided a presentation that reflected key themes of the RAP. In addition to this, we heard from our CEO, Michael Perusco, Principal, Joanne Alford and Senior Manager of Aboriginal Service Development, Sarah Dawson.

The Berry Street School's RAP vision

"Our wider vision for reconciliation is an Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are acknowledged as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies and waterways of our nation. An Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are valued, respected and influential in building a nation that is informed and equitable."

The Berry Street School is committed to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures within our classrooms, playgrounds and local communities. We will support a learning environment that teaches our true and shared histories and will support a culturally safe learning environment where pride in identity flourishes and the longest living culture is celebrated"



The Berry Street School's RAP Vision Actions

- Build and maintain culturally safe, aware and responsive classrooms and curriculum
- Directly address racism
- Enrich each student's knowledge of culture and history
- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by valuing, respecting and listening to the voices of families and carers and community organisations
- Support students to grow up connected to their cultures
- Develop hope and courage through celebrating culture in all its forms
- Build a deeper understanding and knowledge of First Nations worldviews amongst students and staff

You can view the Berry Street School's Reconciliation Action Plan [here](#).

Acknowledging Country

Acknowledgment of Country Plaques



As per our RAP deliverable, our Corporate Services team resourced Acknowledgement plaques to display Berry Street office sites across Victoria. In total, 56 plaques were ordered from 100% Aboriginal owned and operated business, Kinya Lerrk. Acknowledgement plaques include acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land in which the plaque is displayed, along with the totem attached to that country. These beautiful plaques will be displayed in the new year.

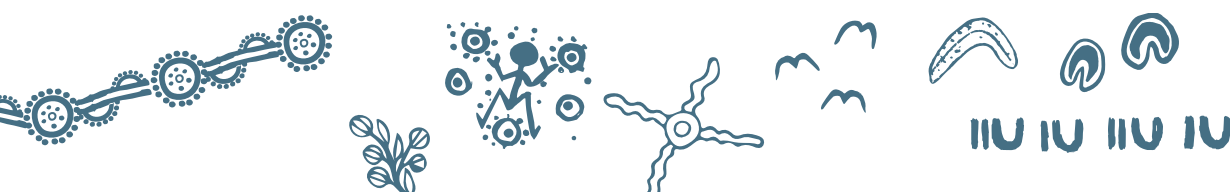
Teaching Family Model (TFM) Acknowledging Country in interviews and Training

Interviews

Berry Street's Teaching Family Model is committed to embedding reconciliation in their program. This has included a process that involves inviting applicants who apply to work in the program to commence their interview by providing an Acknowledgement of Country. The program supports candidates by circulating the Respecting the Traditional Custodians document prior to the interview. It is important to note that while this process is invitational, all candidates to date have embraced the opportunity.

Training

The TFM program has also included inviting staff to provide an Acknowledgment of Country in the program's 5-day training. To begin, a trainer will commence day 1 by providing an Acknowledgment. Following this, there is a



discussion regarding the importance of Acknowledgements, what they represent and how they relate to reconciliation. In addition, the trainer provides the Respecting the Traditional Custodians resource, inviting staff to begin or continue their own process of reconciliation and decolonisation. For the remaining days of training, participants are provided with an opportunity to open the day with an Acknowledgement of Country.

Assistant Director of TFM, Frances Head: *“Our TFM Leadership Team has reflected on how powerful this was to see, people who have never completed an Acknowledgement, doing the research, preparing and giving it the time and space, it deserves, particularly early career folks. It was awesome – we will do it from now on with all training.”*

Relationship Register

Berry Street values and prioritises relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations at a local and state level. We support self-determination and acknowledge that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are most equipped to have power, choice and control over determining best outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

To reflect on Berry Street’s current relationships, a relationship register was developed to better understand the relationships our programs hold with ACCOs across portfolios. This living document identifies:

- Areas where we have strong relationships
- Existing relationships we need to strengthen
- Programs and roles that require support to establish relationships



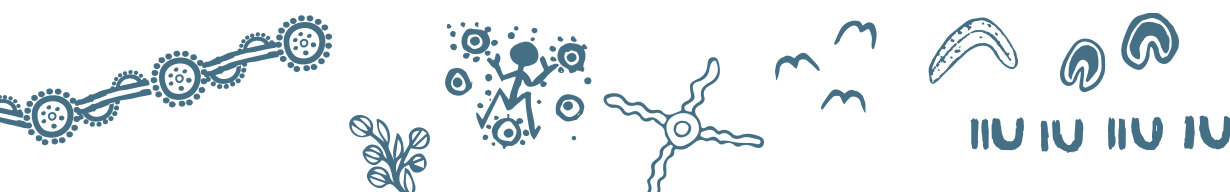
In addition, the relationship register has articulated areas of potential growth for new relationships and partnerships, which will support the development of projects in the Innovate RAP

Significant events during COVID

Berry Street recognises significant dates for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. As a result of the pandemic in 2021, events shifted to engaging online. Some examples of how we recognised significant dates include:

26 January- Survival Day/Invasion Day

On 27 January 2021, staff united online at 12:30pm to view the Four Corner’s episode of Dondale Youth Detention Centre. The episode detailed the shocking experience and brutal mistreatment of Aboriginal boys in custody in 2016. The episode was challenging to watch; however, we did this because we value truth telling as an organisation and country. We recognise that the experience of young people must be heard, and we see it as our role to speak out when we see injustice.





In addition to this, Berry Street supported Change the Date through internal and external platforms. This included circulating emails that detailed what 26 January means to staff members who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, discussing 26 January at team meetings and in the Anti-Racism and Ally-Ship group chat, being active on social media platforms along with Berry Street CEO, Michael Perusco, who released a statement in support of change the date.

“It is my view that holding Australia Day on 26 January is racist. It ignores the significance of this date to all Australians and diminishes what it means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is fact that 26 January 1788 was the start of 200+ years of systematic oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,”
Michael Perusco, CEO

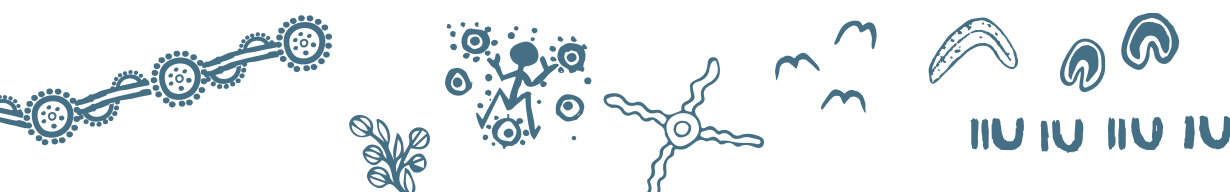
You can access the full statement [here](#).

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) “More than a word, reconciliation takes action”

This year’s theme “more than a word, reconciliation takes action” deeply resonated with Berry Street’s Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and its key themes. This includes the organisation taking action to support Truth-Telling, Cultural Safety, Cultural Connection and the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voice being heard, valued and respected.

Earlier in the year, we held 6 RAP celebrations in recognition of this reconciliation milestone. We informed staff of our commitments and referenced several key projects we would be undertaking throughout the year. During NRW we shared 6 key projects from 6 executive portfolios. These included:

Portfolio	Project
CEO	Revised Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
People and Culture	Review of policies and procedures
Organisation Effectiveness	Respecting the Traditional Custodians of the land Resource
Corporate Services	Supply Nation Membership
Strategic Engagement	Reconciliation through our Berry Street website
Organisational Effectiveness & Services	Cultural Support Plan project



In addition, we recognised that National Reconciliation Week is about the relationship between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider population. We are mindful that this week provides many opportunities for Berry Street to strengthen relationships or build new ones by attending cultural events in community. To do this, our Executive Leadership Team and Walking Together Group attended events throughout Victoria, and supported staff by strongly encouraging attendance at an event in community following COVID restrictions or to access events online.



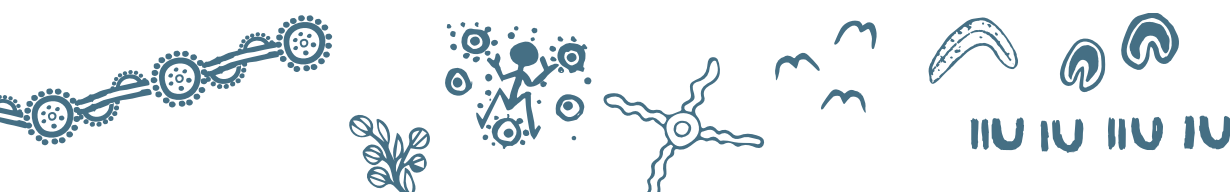
NAIDOC WEEK - Heal Country!

Reflecting on this year's theme, and the work that we do at Berry Street, we asked our staff to heal country, by supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples we care for to connect to their country/countries. Our CEO urged all staff working directly with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples to explore connecting young mob to their country/countries through the many events that were held during NAIDOC (following COVID restrictions). We noted that there was still opportunity for mob who cannot be on country/countries to connect via events held online. In addition to this, we sent out cultural t-shirts to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service users that included our RAP artwork that was designed by the Elders Art Group and Koori Youth Group in Morwell.



Amongst our staffing group, we knew that it was crucial for staff to engage in community driven events, celebrating the cultural knowledge and wisdom of the longest living continuous culture in the world. To support our staff throughout the week, we provided information regarding events held in community and online.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day – Proud in Culture, Strong in Spirit



This year's theme was "Proud in Culture, Strong in Spirit". On this day, we had an opportunity to reflect on our sphere of influence in supporting 4 August amongst all children and families that we work alongside.

To support this, we asked staff to:

- Acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day in daily interactions internally and externally
- Utilise the resources provided by SNAICC with all service users
- Access the cultural connection resources on the Aboriginal Service Development page
- View *In my Blood it Runs*

While we are mindful that 4 August celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children today, we acknowledge that it also marks a day of remembrance. A day where we hold in mind the Aboriginal children of the past, who were stolen by force and placed into orphanages and institutions. Most of these children were identified by the number on a chain worn around their neck and did not know their own birthdays, however, were told that their birthday was 4 August.

On that day, and every other day, we hold in our hearts and minds, the Aboriginal children of the Stolen Generations. We recognise that their rights as children were removed based off culture and are committed to supporting a reconciled country that can and must do better.

We all have a role to play in reconciliation and on 4 August, we encouraged service users, colleagues, friends and family to celebrate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who are the emerging leaders of future generations.

Preparation for January 26, 2022

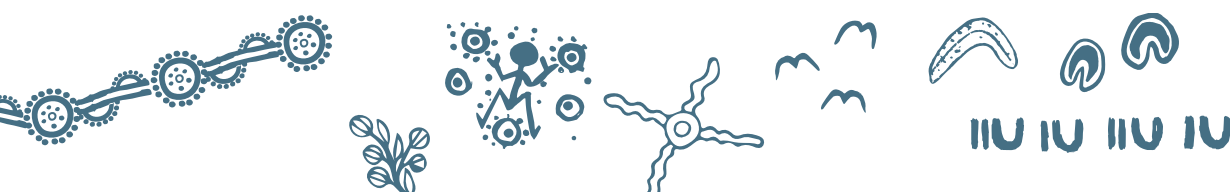
For the first time in Berry Street's 140+ year history, we will provide the option for staff to work (where possible) on 26 January 2022, standing in solidarity with the 'change the date' campaign. Staff working on this day, will be able take an alternate day of leave. This significant reconciliation milestone demonstrates turning goodwill into real action and aligns with our organisational stance that Australia Day should be on a date that doesn't represent Invasion.



In addition to this, Berry Street will host an Anti-Racism activity to recognise 26 January early next year. This activity was piloted by Berry Street's Walking Together Group and will include a series of connection activities, a short viewing of a film, breakout rooms to yarn up and allocated debriefing time. Further information about this activity will be provided in early 2022.

Planning for an Innovate RAP

Following the completion of Berry Street's Reflect RAP, we will begin developing an [Innovate](#) RAP in early 2022. This stage of RAP supports the establishment of innovative ideas, trialling projects over a 2-year period. While the purpose the Reflect RAP is internal, Innovate heavily focuses on the link between internal and external, specifically, partnering with ACCOs. We look forward to engaging with ACCOs and portfolios across Berry Street to explore potential projects in the new year.



It is important to note that while the deliverables in the Reflect RAP are complete, reconciliation at Berry Street is 365 days a year. This means that we will continue to operate under the values of the RAP document, supporting new opportunities to embed reconciliation. Our Reflect RAP values include:

- Recognising our true history - as an organisation and country
- Support a culturally safe, aware and competent workforce
- Support cultural connection for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples
- Support self-determination
- Actively listen to the voices of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Celebrate the great strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

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