

ANTaR Vic and RecVic LRG Forum February 2015-02-21

Father Tucker's Room, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy.

Attendance: Matt Bell, Deb Chapman, John Baxter, Helen Bennett, Nina Photakis, Emily Chauvel Byrne, Joyce Dodge, Marg Lynn, Bob Heaton, Jan Aitken, Bob West, Georgina Gartland, Kasumi Nishida, Frank O'Connor, Tom, John Murray, Howard Tankey, Diana Collier, Peter Lewis, Wally Johnson, Peter Harvey, Terry Makin.

Apologies: Ann Conway, Liz Brumer, Jim Poulter, Rosemary Rule, Geelong One Fire, Jo Whitehead, Damien O'Keefe, Ian James.

Reconciliation Victoria Report Highlights:

- 6 Month report to AAV, negotiating a new 4 year funding agreement,
- external evaluation looking at the last 3.5 years of past funding agreement. Draft evaluation report due May. Local groups can help by speaking with the evaluating consultation when the time comes.
- Reconciliation Australia advise insufficient funds for local reconciliation week activity funding [funding has since become available and 13 small grants have been awarded].
- HART awards nomination process underway. The awards ceremony is being held on May 28.

Please see the attached report for the full details.

ANTaR Victoria Report Highlights:

- At a recent strategic planning day the committee agreed that a campaign for a smarter and fairer Victorian Justice system is a key focus in 2015 for ANTaR Victoria.
- Also building awareness around Treaties, while also supporting CR and sharing progress on both with members.

Please see the attached report for the full details.

Reports for the Local Reconciliation Groups.

Banyule – recently Council has put acknowledgement plaques on all public building and is supporting the upcoming Heidelberg festival. Terry Makin is on the key advisory group for the project creating an Aboriginal Hub in Banyule at Babarrbunin Beek on the Darebin Creek.

Bendigo – new reconciliation group still determining their aims. Tomorrow Bill Gamage is talking about his book the 'Biggest Estate on earth'. There is an Annual Art exhibition, May to June, with internationally recognised Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists.

Reconciliation Eastern Melbourne – REM, TEAR, Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP) and Rec Vic held a forum on Constitutional Recognition. They targeted groups that may not normally attend such events eg rotary and church groups, with the intention of getting them to spread their learning's from the forum to their own groups. There is a Facebook page to support the initiative.

Queenscliff – project to create a sculpture of a traditional man and woman holding a baby, on the Point Lonsdale heads. The Wathaurong Coop, RAP group and Heritage Council have approved the concept. Correspondence in papers about it has produced some resistance. An interesting local debate to watch.

Stonnington – broadening contacts with Council. The story of the Reconciliation process has been aided by Education History Kit. Sam Hibbins, a Green candidate, was elected as Local member in Prahran. The Boon Wurrung have been involved in legal actions on RAP (Registered Aboriginal Party) -type issues. Stonnington will be taking part in Flavours, a multicultural festival.

Nillumbik - connections with schools is their core focus. There was general discussion about resources available for schools such as a Wurundjeri resource kit, ANTaR Sea of Hands schools kit, Recognise Australia RAP schools kit. Observations were made about how business, schools and the community are calling on the Nillumbik group for reconciliation advice.

Maroondah – were part of a successful Maroondah Festival. However, they have diminishing membership involvement.

Moreland – consultation with council on their RAP. Working on aboriginal perspectives on early education.

Bass Coast – Margaret Lynn reported more positive community support for reconciliation since the co-op opened. Recent Forum was successful. With the name change of the McMillan electorate there is a campaign for an indigenous name – it was noted that the AEC give priorities to indigenous names.

Yarra Ranges – attended, along with other REM people, an excellent community day at the MMIGP on March 14th. The Belgrave Survival Day needs more committee members.

Whitehorse Friends of Reconciliation – will be participating in the Whitehorse Global Fiesta - Box Hill Gardens, 15th March. The Koorie Night Market will be present, There is a Cultural Day organised for the 2nd week of the school holidays at the Blackburn Lake Sanctuary. Aimed at kids and families associated with VACCA (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Association) and the MMIGP to develop cultural awareness and pride.

Western Reconciliation Group – 6 local councils came together for a concert and forum. Ian Hamm, Shireen Morris and Mark McMillan spoke.

Concerned australians – conducted a successful Treaty Forum. Georgina reported back on key observations of panellists.

National issues – 150 WA remote communities could close. There is disadvantage and dysfunction in some, but not all. The WA government's plans are wilfully destroying their connection to land. Georgina highlighted Nova Peris speech in Parliament and Jo Morrison's National Press Club address and Bob Gosfords article about indigenous incarceration rates

Constitutional Recognition (CR) Update:

Emily appealed for people to write to Ken Wyatt, Co-Chair of the Joint Select Committee, to highlight your concerns about the CR process.

Mark McMillan – has perspective is that Constitutional Recognition don't have any implications on Sovereignty and Treaty.

Constitutional Recognition Coalition – working on engagement with Interfaith networks and ACCOs and other local group networks. Aboriginal communities need to be in the loop more.

Recognise fundraising gala in December resulted to public comments by the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader, an additional \$5M was announced to support the campaign. However still no firm leadership on the issue.

Justice Campaign Panel

Panellists' Introductions

Her Honour Judge Whelan is a Federal Court judge who was very active on the Federal Court RAP process, the first Jurisdiction in the Australia to have one. She also participates on the judicial officer's cultural awareness committee. This committee makes contributions around promoting awareness of Aboriginal cultural issues and raises with government those areas of particular concern.

Federal court goes out to regional communities for sittings – can see new stolen generation evolving as children being removed from troublesome family or community settings.

Elisa Buggy - Manager at Children's Court, Drug Treatment Court – not really a court but effectively a program within the children's court, a first in Australia. The Drug Treatment Court has been in Australia for 15 years – drug court is a sentencing option. Sentencing is held in abeyance while an offender is undertaking a drug counselling program. They work with local community groups to encourage participation in the drug court program, however, the family drug treatment program is having more success in the Northern catchment area. It is a non-adversarial program that is actively trying to be as culturally safe and sensitive as possible.

Therapeutic justice, justice reinvestment and Restorative justice – are models trying to truly humanise the justice system.

Dr Peter Lewis – Oxfam Australia, National Indigenous Policy Lead, ANTaR National President and ANTaR Victoria Committee Member. Co-Author of Close the Gap Shadow Report.

NATSILS (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service) and Congress lead a new coalition on Justice Reinvestment called Change the Record. ANTaR, Oxfam, Amnesty, SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) and Family Violence prevention are also Coalition members.

Closing the Gap – Justice targets need to be on COAG agenda

Why do we jail people?

To protect the community. Incarceration evolved to be a method of rehabilitation and then integration back into the community. Late 20th century diversion programs were ways to keep people out of jail after an offence has been committed. Jail is always the last option. There are often

special laws to keep specific people in jail, a small percentage though. The majority start off behind the eight ball or as juvenile offenders.

Families with history of incarceration or un-employment are more likely to have a history of criminality.

Jail is a really lazy option to address a 'whole of society' issue – out of sight and out of mind. The question was raised – what contribution could prisoners make if given a second chance?

What are the drivers of incarceration rates?

Drivers – alcohol and drugs

Colonisation – foundations reinforcing structured inequality. All our work on CR, Treaty and Reconciliation will change the foundations

It was not so long ago that aboriginality was a risk factor in the chances of children getting sentenced.

Government decides what is a crime and who goes to jail, eg. mandatory sentencing, where this could still be effectively driven by the courts.

Possible Solutions

Aboriginal pilot programs are getting results. They have solutions but they need to be trusted and funded.

Residential programs

Make the federal court more accessible. Promote awareness of the court as helpful options. Options to indemnify other family members to be custodians. Educating our own judges eg seminars for all Victorian judges on aboriginal kinship.

Koorie Children's court. Koorie Family court soon to open.

Practitioners in the court a positive solution in NZ.

Murial Bamblett and others are engaged in setting up koorie courts. La Perouse Federal Court pilot came from RAP process and consultation with aboriginal communities.

Koorie justice unit looking into gendered issues – for example domestic violence towards aboriginal women,

10th Annual Indigenous Law Conference in September in Melbourne.