



Reconciliation Action Plan 2016 - 2017

Our Business

At Noah's Ark, we offer a range of services and programs that support children aged 0-8 with a range of disabilities, developmental delays and their families.

We work in partnership with families, services and communities to give children the best opportunities for learning, development and wellbeing.

We do this by:

- providing direct support to families who have children with disabilities, particularly to support children's development through our Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS); and
- providing support to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services to support high quality inclusion of children with disabilities.

Our organisation currently employs approximately 250 staff including full-time, part-time and casual employees. We have one staff member who identifies as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. We have office sites in rural areas of Swan Hill, Bendigo, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Bairnsdale, Wonthaggi, Morwell, Horsham, Geelong and the ACT. We also have teams in metropolitan Melbourne, including Maidstone, Springvale, Frankston, Hoppers Crossing, Craigieburn and Heidelberg. Our head office is in Malvern.

Our RAP

At Noah's Ark Inc., we acknowledge the wisdom, strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are also aware of the discrimination and injustices Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have, and continue to, suffer. We are conscious of the underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programmes. We are also aware of the significant proportion of children in ECEC services who are developmentally vulnerable, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Department of Education and Training, 2016; The Social Research Centre, May 2014; The Australian Early Development Census, 2015).

We are committed to building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations and providing respectful, responsive and culturally relevant services.

Our Strategic Plan reflects our purpose, vision and values. It is a plan that articulates our desire to be an innovative and high quality organisation. Our vision is that 'every child develops meaningful relationships, participates and learns with the encouragement and understanding of their families, carers and communities'. This vision is important in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. By developing a Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), we aim to ensure an organisational approach to Reconciliation.

Noah's Ark strives to be responsive to the needs and expectations of all the families and services that we work with. To ensure we provide high quality supports to services and families we need to gain a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of being and knowing, and better understand the cultural issues faced by many families and children. We have built strong, positive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations in some regions of Victoria, but these have been developed by individual staff members rather than through organisational leadership, direction and commitment. In some regions, staff have engaged in cultural safety training, but again this is region specific rather than whole of organisation expectation and approach.

Noah's Ark staff actively participates in community events such as NAIDOC Week, always acknowledges the Traditional Owners, and pays respect to Elders past and present in our training programs and public presentations. Our office environments aim to be welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Reconciliation initiatives we have already implemented include the following:

- All of our sites display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and Acknowledgement of Country in the foyer.
- Noah's Ark has invested in Aboriginal artwork, displayed in office spaces across the state. In three offices, we have the artist's stories, which they have kindly shared with us to display. They include the following artwork:
 - In Swan Hill, the artist is Quinton Jack Atkinson. Jack has come to the office and borrowed the painting to exhibit at the local art gallery in the past. We recently discovered that Jack and the local early years Kindergarten Engagement Support Officer (KESO) are siblings so it was nice to share with her that we have his painting in our space.
 - In the Canberra office there is a painting titled *Pathways and Communities* by Lynette Talbot, a Jerinja woman from Nowra.
 - In the Morwell office, there is a painting titled *Three Meeting Places* by Ronald Edwards, a Gunnai man from Morwell.
- We are starting to implement Acknowledgement of Country at our state-wide Team Leader meetings and Welcome to Country at our staff conference.
- Noah's Ark has begun to build relationships with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) and Reconciliation Victoria. We envisage that these organisations may assist us to understand protocols and ensure our practice and collaboration across our teams is respectful and meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- The ACT team has recently become involved in the Opening Doors Project. This project aims to enhance the range, quality and access to NDIS services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One of the elements of this initiative is to assist organisations in implementing strategies to improve cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples accessing their supports and services. For Noah's Ark, being part of this project will involve learning from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community in a number of ways, including presentations, forums with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community members, teaching tools and specific information and advice relevant to Noah's Ark.

Our RAP Team

Our RAP team have been meeting for more than nine months and are committed to developing a strong and innovative RAP, with clear actions and outcomes. In line with our Terms of Reference our RAP champions are representatives:

- from the executive; in this case the Senior Manager of Services
- of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent; in this case is the Project Leader.

The group includes the Senior Manager of Services, Operations Manager and three Key Workers. These members are located across the state (rural and metropolitan) and one from interstate (ACT). We believe this will enable us to gain perspectives from both Metropolitan and Regional issues and build on community engagement opportunities. At this stage, we do not have any external representatives, but plan to in the future once we have established our key stakeholders.

All members of the RAP working group have completed and discussed their responses to a RAP reconciliation self-reflection tool as one of the first steps in understanding the challenges and opportunities for the group and the organisation.

RAP meetings are held every four weeks while the RAP is being developed and progress will be monitored on a needs basis depending on the achievement of goals.

Our Partnerships and Current Activities

In a number of our regions, our staff has established relationships with Koori Engagement Support Officers (KESO), Koori Preschool Assistants, Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services and Local Health Services. In the Mallee region, the Mildura KESO has taken part in our services EXPO, which is an event that brings early childhood services together to support the inclusion of all children in childcare services.

Our internal initiatives have included participation in activities during National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day. In the Mallee region Noah's Ark staff participate in the Local Family Fun Days held during NAIDOC week, they also do the local walk to the flag-raising event. The Mallee staff have also been invited to attend activities held on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's day. The contribution to these days has included providing activities for the children to participate in and information about our programs. These days have proven to be an important networking opportunity and have raised Noah's Ark's profile in the community. Because we established a relationship with Mallee District Aboriginal Service Maternal Child Team, Noah's Ark has provided a space within our office for the Health Service to conduct the Maternal and Child Health checks. Further work needs to be undertaken to identify these relationships across specific teams throughout the organisation to determine what activities are being undertaken. We are committed to doing this through our Reflect RAP.

In 2007/2008 Noah's Ark managed three projects in the Loddon, Mallee and Gippsland regions. These projects explored the barriers to inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Through the process of the RAP, we want to continue to explore this, endeavour to affect change and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.

Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
RAP Working Group actively monitors RAP development and implementation of actions, tracking progress and reporting.	• Meet quarterly to monitor on RAP implementation	September 2016 February 2017 May 2017	Senior Manager of Services
	• Review and update the Terms of Reference annually	February 2017	Project Leader
	• Ensure the RAP Working Group continues to support the development of our RAP and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented as part of the RWG	February 2017	
	• Develop and distribute an expression of interest to join the RWG to key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our sphere of influence	February 2017	
Build internal and external relationships	• Prioritise, plan and delegate responsibilities to develop an approach to stakeholder engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations	March 2017	RAP champions
	• Identify existing relationships we currently have with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations	March 2017	RAP champions
	• Develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations throughout Victoria and ACT that we could approach to connect with and develop a relationship		
	• Develop a list of RAP organisations that we could approach to work alongside		
	• Build partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations		

Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Participate in and celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage our staff to participate in an external National Reconciliation Week event • Circulate relevant resources and reconciliation materials to Noah's Ark staff through our internal website • Ensure our Working Group participates in a relevant external event to recognise and celebrate National Reconciliation Week 	27 May - 3 June 2017	Communications Manager Working group representative
Raise internal and external awareness of our RAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a communication plan to raise awareness amongst all Noah's Ark staff about our RAP activities and commitments • Communicate about the RAP with the Noah's Ark Board through bi-annual updates • Develop regional engagement plans • Provide quarterly updates to the organisation around the implementation of the plan or when significant goals have been achieved • Raise external awareness of our RAP through the Noah's Ark website • Engage our senior leaders in the delivery of RAP outcomes 	December 2016 June 2016 & 2017 December 2017 July 2016 July 2016	Working group representative Communications Manager

Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Investigate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural learning and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capture data and measure our staff's current level of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements 	December 2016	Senior Manager of Services Operations Managers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a review of cultural awareness training needs within our organisation 	February 2017	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a cultural awareness learning strategy for Noah's Ark staff 	June 2017	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all Working Group members use Reconciliation Australia's Share Our Pride online tool 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate and encourage staff to use Reconciliation Australia's Share Our Pride online tool to all staff 		
Raise internal understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore who the Traditional Owners are of the lands and waters of each of the Noah's Ark sites 	December 2016	Working Group Senior Manager of Services Operations Managers Team Leaders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scope and develop a list of local Traditional Owners of the lands and waters within our organisations sphere of influence (VIC and ACT) 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a plan to raise awareness and understanding of the meaning and significance behind Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols (including any local cultural protocols) 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review procedures relating to appropriate display of site-specific statements of knowledge 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an Acknowledgement of Country at all state-wide meetings, Noah's Ark conferences and Sector Leadership events 	July 2016	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and include Acknowledgement of Country statement on the Noah's Ark website and internal website 	July 2016	

Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Participate in and celebrate NAIDOC Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff of the meaning of NAIDOC Week, which includes information about the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities • Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting community events in our local area through internal email and message board systems • Ensure members of our Working Group participate in an external NAIDOC Week event within the local community 	3-10 July 2016	Communications Manager Team Leaders Operations Managers
Participate in and celebrate National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff of the meaning of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day which includes information about the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities and information about issues that are particularly relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children • Introduce our staff to National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day by promoting community events in our local area through internal email and message board systems • Ensure members of our Working Group participate in an external National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day Week event within the local community 	4 August 2016	Communications Manager Team Leaders Staff Teams

Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Investigate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment	• Identify current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to inform future employment and development opportunities	February 2017	Human Resources Manager
	• Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation	July 2017	
	• Review current recruitment and retention policies and procedure for engaging and sustaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the workforce	July 2017	
	• Ensure employment details include option for staff to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and information is confidential and in line with Noah's Ark policies	December 2016	
Investigate leadership and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff	• Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership (e.g. mentoring Excellence in Practice, peer-to-peer support)	December 2017	Human Resources Manager Training Manager
	• Explore opportunities for student placement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through consultation with registered training organisations		

Tracking and Progress

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
Build support for the RAP	• Define resource needs for RAP development and implementation	December 2016	Working Group
	• Complete the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire and submit to Reconciliation Australia	30 September 2016	
	• Define systems and capability needs to track, measure and report on RAP activities	June 2017	
Review and Refresh RAP	• Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new Review and refresh RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements	February 2017	Working Group
	• Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal review and endorsement	June 2017	



Contact Details

Kerry Bull
Senior Manager, Services

T: 03 8823 8600

M: 0457 828 044

E: kerry.bull@noahsarkinc.org.au

