

Reconciliation takes action

In 2019, educator Casey Goodman started the Moreland Reconciliation Network Group. Her aim? To support early childhood services in her local area to share their reconciliation journey. We sat down with Casey to chat about the personal experience that sparked her work in this space and to unpack what we can do as educators to take positive action.



Casey, it's a great thrill to speak to you about your inspirational work.

Thank you. Absolutely my pleasure! Before we get into the interview, I'd like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Owners of the land that I live, learn and teach on. I wish to pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and extend that respect and Acknowledgment to the Traditional Owners of the lands of your readers.

What initially sparked your reconciliation journey? What influences have sustained your ongoing commitment to reconciliation in early education and care?

In December 2017, my family, including my parents and younger siblings, became approved foster carers for the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. Having amazing, strong Aboriginal children in our family home and my parents' care led me to reflect on my role in the early childhood education sector.

I work with children each day but was questioning if I had the skills and knowledge to support a child in the classroom who may identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

I knew I had some learning to do, I knew I needed to educate myself – and that's exactly what I've been doing ever since. This experience in my home changed how I view my role in early years education and has created a commitment I cannot ignore. If I do nothing, the children in the classrooms I work in are receiving the same whitewashed education that I did and will spend adulthood unlearning and relearning. Let's do something to change that!



You're the Leader of Reconciliation and Aboriginal Programs at Moreland Community Child Care Centres (MCCCC). How did you land this position and what does it involve?

It was actually a slow and gradual process, and it takes me back to 2019 when our Pedagogical Leader identified that we needed to embed Aboriginal pedagogies and perspectives across our curriculums and programs, but didn't know quite how to.

We began connecting with the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) 'Talking Reconciliation' special interest group and attended the 2019 ECA Reconciliation Symposium to learn more. Through a leadership program with MCCCC, my interest in and passion for exploring reconciliation and privileging Aboriginal pedagogies and perspectives within the curriculums and programs grew.

In 2020, I moved into a dedicated role, one day per week, to connect and build relationships with local Aboriginal organisations, people and consultants, and provide staff with up-to-date resources. I also attended professional learning, coordinated Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) working group meetings and connected with networks.

I now work two days a week in the dedicated role, supported by the MCCCC leadership team, a strong educational leadership team and a staff cohort that are doing so much amazing learning, unlearning and relearning.

That's a pretty impressive journey for you and MCCCC! What have been the highlights in your role? Any big wins?

On your point about highlights, it's important to note that this work isn't about recognition. I actually felt I shouldn't be the one to take the mic on this piece but I also feel strongly that there is power in non-Indigenous educators and teachers seeing that other non-Indigenous educators and teachers are taking action.

The biggest highlight in my role has been noticing a shift in my colleagues' cultural awareness and understanding, and observing them move from using 'tokenistic' as an excuse not to engage to now looking at their educational curriculums and programs as opportunities to engage meaningfully with Aboriginal perspectives and pedagogies. This is noticeable in the children's learning outcomes – the children in our four-year-old kinder room today have only ever known a classroom or learning space that starts the day with an Acknowledgment of Country. How amazing is that!

What have been the biggest challenges in your role? What are some of the lessons you've learned along the way?

Challenges include the differing levels of knowledge, understanding and awareness of staff. It can often mean that moving forward happens in different stages and takes longer in some areas than others. But we must not leave anyone behind – we all have a part to play. It will always be the children at our services who benefit most from this work or, on the other hand, miss out if we give up too easily.

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The biggest lesson for me on a personal level has been the inner reflective work that I do each day by asking myself: *What am I doing? Why am I doing it? How am I doing it? And how can I make sure that I’m holding space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and peoples?* As an educator, I can positively contribute by ensuring that the future of this country is in the hands of children who are aware – aware of Traditional Owners’ histories and languages, aware of their role to be allies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, and aware of the importance of listening with respect.

In 2019, you started the Moreland Reconciliation Network Group. Can you tell us a little about the group?

The network was created so that early childhood services in the area could connect and share their reconciliation journeys, and support and encourage each other in this continually developing space. This group engages in robust, professional and reflective discussions, and shares resources so that Indigenous peoples are not tasked with being educators for those who should be working to educate themselves.

How has your Inclusion Professional supported your work?

Magnificently! Our Inclusion Professional, Liz Da Silva, has been exceptionally supportive of my work in the reconciliation space. She has connected me with the Innovative Solutions Cultural Facilitator and arranged multiple meetings to mobilise additional guidance and support.

Additionally, Liz has been an excellent support in sharing my resources and network group amongst her contacts. Liz has also been vital in my experience with Innovative Solutions funding applications and kindly gave her time to support me in this process.

Why do you believe reconciliation is so important in early education and care?

We have rich and diverse Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages, which must be shared and acknowledged in early childhood education. It’s important to invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into our classrooms so that children aren’t always hearing a non-Indigenous person speak about these very diverse cultures. We need to be doing work as teachers and educators to make a stand against past colonial policies and institutional injustices to ensure that our learning communities and classrooms are culturally safe, supportive and respectful, and include consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

How has your reconciliation journey changed you as an educator?

It’s changed the ways I teach and educate young children every day. Each time I walk into a classroom, I look out for all the ways I can embed and privilege an Aboriginal perspective or pedagogy. I share resources and links with families so the learning journey can continue beyond the four walls of the classroom. I make sure that my knowledge of how to embed Aboriginal perspectives and pedagogies is shared with the teaching team. It’s a ‘one in, all in’ approach of taking them on the journey with me.

What advice do you have for educators just starting on their reconciliation journey?

My advice is to be open and comfortable learning alongside children, families and colleagues. Put your hand up and say you don’t know the answer but be



willing to research and investigate to find out more. Be mindful not to push your personal political stance within the classroom but work hard to share the voices, lived experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members from far and wide with children.

As teachers and educators, we can invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into our classrooms. It’s important that children hear first-hand and see Aboriginal peoples speaking about matters that affect their communities.

When finding and sourcing resources to share with colleagues, families or children, be sure to use factual information from reputable sources.

There is no right or wrong way but as [Aboriginal early childhood advisor] Jessica Staines says ‘it is better to do something than nothing at all’.

What’s the next big goal you are working towards?

My next big goal is helping to get the RAP published. It’s been in the making for three years and we’ve worked really hard to make consistent, meaningful progress on our commitment and actions.

Most importantly, on a personal level, my goal is to continue to learn and understand more, to listen to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and when there is a call to action, make sure that I’m doing my part. I want to attend and support community events and connect to community in a deeper, more meaningful way.



Have you included reconciliation actions in your Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP)?

Here are some examples to inspire you:

- Reflect on current practices with your Inclusion Professional and explore ways you can embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and cultural safety principles in your program
- Introduce a daily Acknowledgement of Country and teach children and families about its cultural importance
- Participate in Indigenous events to build reciprocal relationships with local Elders and your local Aboriginal Corporation
- Link with your Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO) to build a deeper understanding of Koorie culture, history and experience
- Connect with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI) or the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) to deepen your First Nations knowledge and inclusive practices
- Join a reconciliation network, such as ECA’s ‘Talking Reconciliation’ special interest group, to share your reconciliation journey with like-minded services
- Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) on the free Narragunnawali platform for schools and early learning services (www.narragunnawali.org.au)
- Apply for \$10k+ in Innovative Solutions funding to enhance your team’s cultural competence and embed First Nations perspectives across your service (viac.com.au/inclusion-development-fund)