

NEWTOWN

Neighbourhood Centre

New(town) Beginnings # 1 1

Dear Neighbour,

Listen and Learn.

If I was to attribute two verbs that are integral to practicing effective community development, I'd choose the above mentioned 'L's'.

Recently I took part in a two-day First Nations Cultural Awareness training run by Innari Inc. It was confronting but I believe it was entirely necessary to experience, and it has shifted my perception of this country forever.

Here at the Centre, I have had the opportunity to know many local Aboriginal families, and what always strikes me as so profoundly beautiful is their unwavering belief that community and family always comes first. Kinship is everything. There is a priority placed on relationships that is completely different to the dominant individualist culture.

There are some pretty uncomfortable truths when it comes to our First Nations people. They are the most incarcerated people on earth per capita, have the highest rates of suicide, and are the largest single group affected by homelessness and poverty.

In the last couple of weeks, we've been supporting three Aboriginal families; all regular faces at the centre. Hearing first-hand the barriers they face daily, you quickly understand how insurmountable the problems can feel.

Each family is facing eviction and subsequently homelessness, primarily because of systematic failures. They have been bounced around from service to service, often given inaccurate information and have been on the receiving end of prejudice and unfair treatment for years.

In one of the cases, two young children have been removed from their mother and the trauma associated with this is heartbreakingly obvious whenever she comes to the Centre. There's such an overwhelming sense of helplessness and desperation all-round, and unfortunately there are limitations to how we can help her remedy the situation.

The phrase 'trauma-informed care' is increasingly used within the sector, but hearing their stories, I get the feeling that many services are not properly equipped to support clients who are dealing with the ramifications of intergenerational trauma and how it manifests and impacts on daily life.

Despite this, we'll often witness the unbreakable bond between the family members. They are each other's strongest advocates.

The training I attended provided me with an opportunity to really think about how I can contribute positively and ensure I am not causing further harm to the individuals and families we work with.

I pledge, and encourage you as well, to keep learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history.

I can strive to be a good ally and advocate for change. I can fight for the record number of children in NSW being taken away from their families. I will forge solid relationships, built on trust and good rapport.

I will talk to my kids so they grow up knowing the truth about the genocide, oppression and injustice this country was built on. Truths my generation was not taught at school. Truths we at NNC want to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to change.

And most importantly I will listen and I will learn.

Mel

Community Strengthening Team

P.S - One way of listening and learning, is through the Arts. If you haven't seen these recent films yet, there are two I would recommend – "The Final Quarter" and "The Australian Dream" – both about Adam Goodes' experience of racism during the final part of his AFL career.

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