

INNOVATE RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

July 2026 to July 2028

blue sky
community services





A MESSAGE

FROM BLUE SKY COMMUNITY SERVICES' CEO

Ruth Thompson
CEO, Blue Sky
Community Services

A message from Blue Sky Community Services' CEO, Ruth Thompson

Blue Sky Community Services has been delivering services in Northern NSW for almost 50 years, and more recently in southeast Queensland. Throughout our history we have worked in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to support positive outcomes, and we continue to do so. We greatly value these partnerships and acknowledge the tremendous strengths that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring to the communities we work in.

We acknowledge the unique histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the challenges they have faced. We acknowledge that while there have been some positive steps forward, there is a great deal of work still to be done to achieve reconciliation between Australia's First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. Blue Sky Community Services has put in place a number of initiatives towards reconciliation and has developed this Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to articulate and strengthen our organisation's commitment to reconciliation, building on the progress made in our previous RAPs. We greatly look forward to working collaboratively with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and local communities as we work towards achievement of the RAP's goals.



**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we live and work and their continuing connection to land, water, sea and community.
We pay respects to Australia's First Peoples, to their unique and diverse cultures, and to Elders past, present and future.**



A MESSAGE FROM RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA CEO

Karen Mundine
CEO, Reconciliation
Australia

Statement from CEO of Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia commends Blue Sky Community Services on the formal endorsement of its Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.

With over 5.5 million people now either working or studying in an organisation with a RAP, the program's potential for impact is greater than ever. Blue Sky Community Services continues to be part of a strong network of more than 3,000 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have taken goodwill and transformed it into action.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously strengthen reconciliation commitments and constantly strive to apply learnings in new ways.

An Innovate RAP is a crucial and rewarding period in an organisation's reconciliation journey. It is a time to build the strong foundations and relationships that ensure sustainable, thoughtful, and impactful RAP outcomes into the future.

An integral part of building these foundations is reflecting on and cataloguing the successes and challenges of previous RAPs. Learnings gained through effort and innovation are invaluable resources that Blue Sky Community Services will

continuously draw upon to create RAP commitments rooted in experience and maturity. These learnings extend to Blue Sky Community Services using the lens of reconciliation to better understand its core business, sphere of influence, and diverse community of staff and stakeholders.

The RAP program's emphasis on relationships, respect, and opportunities gives organisations a framework from which to foster connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rooted in mutual collaboration and trust.

This Innovate RAP is an opportunity for Blue Sky Community Services to strengthen these relationships, gain crucial experience, and nurture connections that will become the lifeblood of its future RAP commitments. By enabling and empowering staff to contribute to this process, Blue Sky Community Services will ensure shared and cooperative success in the long-term.

Gaining experience and reflecting on pertinent learnings will ensure the sustainability of Blue Sky Community Services' future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, providing meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations Blue Sky Community Services on your third Innovate RAP and I look forward to following your ongoing reconciliation journey.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia

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OUR VISION FOR RECONCILIATION

Blue Sky Community Services, including our Hands and Hearts Early Learning Centres run by our subsidiary HeartCo, has a vision for communities where everyone belongs. We believe everyone has the right to be valued, to feel safe and to have opportunities, and we see reconciliation as an essential part of creating communities where all people can thrive and be included. Our vision for reconciliation is:

WE ARE INCLUSIVE

- We believe that everyone belongs. We embrace diversity and work for equity. Our services are safe and accessible for all cultures and people. Our workforce is diverse, and our workplace is inclusive.

WE RECOGNISE

- The importance of connection to Country, culture, language and connection between First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.
- The importance of walking alongside each other, supporting, bridging gaps and appreciating each other's differences, strengths and gifts.

WE VALUE PARTNERSHIPS

- We are accountable and transparent in our work, including the implementation of reconciliation activities, such as celebrating and acknowledging key dates like National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, and including an Acknowledgement of Country at meetings and events.
- We ensure culturally-safe practices with individuals, families, services and communities in an inclusive, respectful and effective manner.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are supported to achieve their goals and dreams in ways that recognise and respect their rich histories, cultures, strengths, and unique challenges. In our early learning centres, this includes embedding culturally responsive pedagogy and practice, enabling non-Indigenous staff to co-create culturally-safe, inclusive, and empowering learning environments.
- We work in partnership with local Aboriginal Services and organisations to create opportunities to collaborate and develop local reconciliation activities.

OUR BUSINESS

Blue Sky Community Services has its headquarters on Gumbaynggirr Country in Coffs Harbour and delivers services and projects across the Mid North Coast, Far North Coast, New England and Hunter regions of New South Wales as well as Southeast Queensland. We deliver services that support children, young people, families, people with disability, older people and others who are experiencing vulnerability. We deliver projects that build strong and inclusive communities and that strengthen the community services sector. Our services also include Hands and Hearts Early Learning Centres run by our subsidiary HeartCo. All our services work to increase opportunities for reconciliation, working with and in

partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples wherever possible. Blue Sky Community Services has a long-standing commitment to reconciliation and employs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff primarily working on Gumbaynggirr, Dunghutti, Biripi, Worimi, Bundjalung, Githabul, Yaegl, Anaiwan, Kamilaroi, Ngarabal and Banbai homelands. At the time of development of this RAP Blue Sky Community Services had 101 staff, with 6.9% of our workforce being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Hands and Hearts Early Learning Centres have 32 employees with 12.5% being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



OUR RAP

As a non-Indigenous organisation, Blue Sky Community Services is committed to reconciliation and creating meaningful, positive social impact in the communities we serve. We recognise the importance of listening to First Nations Peoples and not speaking on their behalf. We value, respect, and learn from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, staff, participants, and communities, ensuring their voices guide and shape our Reconciliation Action Plan. Guided by local First Nations Peoples and our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, we work to create culturally-safe, inclusive, and empowering environments. Through culturally-responsive practices and a commitment to cultural humility, our staff reflect on their own beliefs and identities while deepening understanding of others' cultures.

This RAP provides an opportunity for us to reflect on our practices, strengthen our approach to reconciliation, and develop strategies that make a real difference. We believe everyone has the right to be valued, to be safe, to have opportunities, and to belong, and we are committed to fostering communities where these principles are realised for all. This RAP also provides a framework that enables our organisation to continually learn, grow, and strengthen our approach to reconciliation, ensuring our actions have meaningful and lasting impact. The Working Group that developed this Reconciliation Action Plan includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members as well as non-Indigenous staff from across the organisation. This RAP has been developed by the following staff members:

Melanie Jacobs – Inclusive Communities Manager, RAP Working Group Lead and Champion

Chontelle Mallie – Youth and Family Facilitator

Zara Patterson – People and Culture Assistant

Erin McKay – Quality and Training Manager

Sarah Mongan – Inclusive Communities Coordinator

Sue Currie – Program Manager: Families, Young People and Communities

Terry Robb – Executive Manager: Service Delivery and Quality

Nicola Dawson – People and Culture Manager

Kylie Warwick – Hands and Hearts Children's Services Manager

OUR RECONCILIATION JOURNEY TO DATE

Over the course of our previous Reconciliation Action Plans, Blue Sky Community Services has undertaken a range of initiatives to create culturally-safe, inclusive, and empowering environments, build partnerships, and strengthen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. These achievements form an important foundation for our ongoing reconciliation journey.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS INCLUDE (OUR RAP CONTINUED)

Welcoming and inclusive practices: employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, embedding cultural awareness and trauma-informed training, conducting Welcome to Country ceremonies, and acknowledging Country at all meetings and events. Development of and implementation of our new organisational First Nations Engagement Strategy.

Cultural visibility: displaying Aboriginal artwork and a locally designed Aboriginal version of our logo across offices and promotional materials.

Partnerships and collaborations: developing strong networks with Aboriginal services, community members, and local Indigenous leaders, and delivering collaborative projects that focus on meaningful outcomes for Aboriginal Peoples.

Participation and cultural safety: ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are actively engaged in programs and services, often exceeding local population representation.

Committee and sector contributions: participating in local working groups and supporting Aboriginal-led initiatives and events, including NAIDOC Week and the Women's Festival.

CHALLENGES AND KEY LEARNINGS

During the implementation of our previous RAP, we encountered several challenges and gained valuable insights that have strengthened our approach to reconciliation:

Respectful engagement with Elders, stakeholders, and community members: Ensuring that we received meaningful input while respecting the time and commitments of Elders and community members was an important challenge. To address this, we developed clear consultation processes, planned meetings well in advance, and varied engagement opportunities to avoid overburdening participants. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff also played a vital role as cultural

advisors throughout this process. This experience reinforced that building respectful, sustainable relationships requires thoughtful planning, active listening, and clear communication.

Integrating reconciliation across our organisation: One of the key challenges we faced was ensuring reconciliation was part of everything we do, rather than separate initiatives. We addressed this by weaving reconciliation objectives into staff responsibilities, operational planning, and program design. This approach highlighted that when reconciliation is embedded into the core of our work, it becomes sustainable, meaningful, and truly influences the way we deliver services and engage with communities.

Sustaining momentum and accountability: Ensuring that reconciliation initiatives remain on track and that progress is visible requires ongoing focus. We established a clear RAP implementation schedule, assigned responsibilities across leadership, and put in place regular reporting processes. This experience reinforced that transparent accountability, clear communication, and consistent follow-through are essential to maintaining momentum and achieving lasting impact.

AREAS OF ONGOING FOCUS

Increasing First Nations representation in governance and decision making, and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are active in our RAP Working Group and decision-making processes, remain key focuses. We continue to extend invitations for participation and maintain formal advisory structures. We recognise that meaningful representation requires ongoing attention, and we are committed to strengthening this throughout the life of this RAP.

Strengthening cultural knowledge across staff: Building cultural awareness and embedding culturally-responsive practices across all staff continues to be a priority. We provide cultural competency training, incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy in our early learning centres, and offer regular opportunities for reflection and learning. We recognise that cultural understanding is a continuous journey, and we remain committed to fostering knowledge and practice as part of our reconciliation efforts.



COVER ART

The Art

The artwork symbolises deep connection to the ocean spiritually, environmentally and mentally, going from along the shoreline to the subtle, distant kangaroo footprints, to waves, sea animals and the flow of the current. In the centrepiece, there are five large waterholes. The waterholes represent cultural significance, spirituality, and connection to water journeys.

The chosen colours for this artwork show shallow to deep waters, (light blue blending into dark blue) while the hint of green highlights the sea animals underneath the water line fading into the deep.

The Current by Hayley Griffen



The Artist

Hayley Griffen is a proud Aboriginal young lady from Anaiwan, Dughutti tribes along the New England area in New South Wales, Australia. Hayley has created and distributed Aboriginal art pieces for 5 years, since 15 years of age, guided by the knowledge and stories passed down from her father and extended family. Hayley had always had a connection to figuring out her self and identity by expressing through Aboriginal art pieces.



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