

Talking Leadership



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique culture and heritage of our Aboriginal peoples and the contributions Aboriginal peoples have made and continue to make to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this publication, the term 'Aboriginal' is intended to encompass the diverse cultures and identities of the First Peoples of Western Australia and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent who call Western Australia home.

Suggested citation

Commissioner for Children and Young People 2018, Talking Leadership, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth.

Alternative formats

On request, large print or alternative format copies of this report can be obtained from the Commissioner for Children and Young People at:

Ground Floor, 1 Alvan Street, Subiaco WA 6008

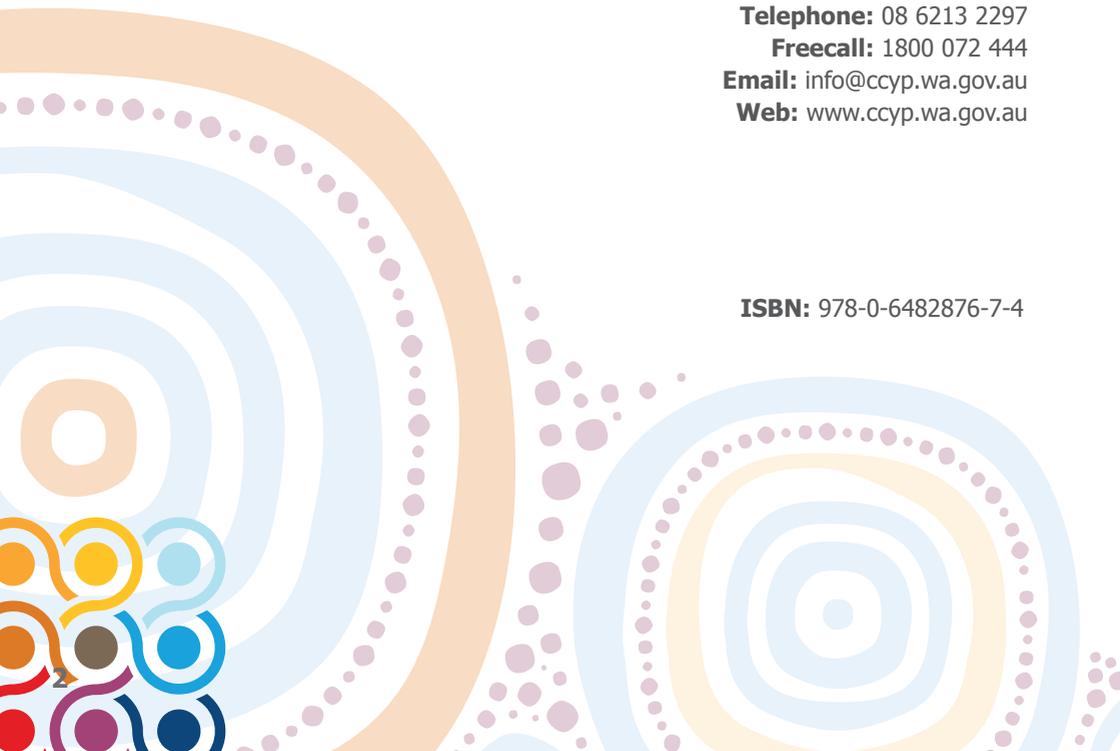
Telephone: 08 6213 2297

Freecall: 1800 072 444

Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au

Web: www.ccyp.wa.gov.au

ISBN: 978-0-6482876-7-4



A message from the Commissioner

Building on from what Aboriginal children and young people have told my office over the years about the importance of role models and people who they can look up to, this publication highlights the various forms of Aboriginal leadership within our Western Australian communities.



This publication contains only a small sample of the many outstanding Aboriginal community leaders working together with their communities to make the future brighter for Aboriginal children and young people. I hope you will find them both inspiring and educational.

Their stories, quotes and messages of support demonstrate the breadth and capacity of Aboriginal leadership and cross-cultural solutions across the state. They speak to the opportunities and support needed to ensure that our young leaders' bold visions for the future are realised, and the role each of us can play in helping to achieve those goals.

For young people, these are just a few examples of the future pathways available to you and the qualities - such as passion, dedication and respect - that are required to achieve your goals. I plan to continue to add leadership profiles such as these to my website as a source of information and inspiration for young people.

I encourage you to seek out Aboriginal leaders in your community - listen to their stories, the challenges they have overcome, and the keys to their success. I encourage you to use that insight to help define your own vision for the future of your community and to include Aboriginal leaders, of all ages, in the journey to realising that vision.

Colin Pettit

Commissioner for Children and Young People

Jolleen Hicks

My name is Jolleen Hicks and I am a **Ngarluma** Aboriginal woman from Roebourne in the Pilbara region of WA. My ancestors come from the river that runs through Roebourne, the Ngunin.

I wear a few hats, but my most important role is as a Director of the Aboriginal medical service in Roebourne, Mawarnkarra Health Service. I have been connected to Mawarnkarra since I was six years old when my Mum started out working there as an Aboriginal Health Worker. Over 20 years later, she is the Chief Executive Officer, and I am in my sixth consecutive year as a Director.



We passionately represent our Aboriginal community through Mawarnkarra. In my day job, I work as a consultant, which mostly involves the design and delivery of workshops that share my experience, insights and successes of working with Aboriginal groups and communities across Australia. I always wanted to be a teacher, but I ended up being a lawyer. However, now I teach what I learned as a lawyer and advocate for Aboriginal people. My decision to start my own consultancy came in 2013 when I faced one of my toughest challenges – being diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 30. Within six months of my successful surgery, I established Roebourne Consulting Services.

The challenges I have faced as a small business owner and consultant is that many people that would benefit from my expertise don't think I can teach them anything due to my age. I turned 35 this year. I have an insight into the Aboriginal cultural world that many people dream of having.

I have worked with and for over 20 separate Aboriginal cultural groups in WA and Queensland in my capacity as their Native Title lawyer. This means I have listened to cultural knowledge and intelligence from Elders that is usually preserved for certain people from that group only.

My strengths lie in my ability to strategically look at matters, ensuring that all perspectives are represented or heard and ensuring that as many people as possible benefit from a decision or outcome.

I feel like my ancestors chose a leadership journey for me as a child and I try my best to honour them in the leadership roles I undertake as a consultant, community representative, family representative and advocate. I remain true to my family and cultural values in all that I do by remaining independent and not conflicted.

Good leadership is about recognising that every person in a team has a role to play, building your team's capacity as individuals and as a collective, learning from those around you, being open and transparent, being held accountable and sharing your successes with your entire team.

If I could give advice to myself at high school, it would be: the more you invest in your education and learning, the greater experiences you will have in your life journey. My advice to young people interested in my journey would be to learn not only from the mainstream education system, but also to learn from Aboriginal people. Leadership is about making a positive impact so that others can benefit more than you.

"People will forget what you said, they will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

We learn something new every day and never stop learning, I am 52 years of age and still learning."

Donna Nelson

Chairperson WA Family Matters Jurisdictional Working Group

Njaki Njaki/Balardong

Dr. Robert Isaacs AM

My name is Dr. Robert Isaacs AM, OAM, JP, PhD and I am an Aboriginal Elder from the **Whadjuk-Bibilum Wardandi Noongar** language group. I am a member of the Stolen Generation. I was raised as a ward of the state under the Native Welfare Department.

I grew up in institutions including St Joseph's Orphanage, Castledare Boys Home, and finally Clontarf Boys Town. I left at the age of 17 with nothing but a battered suitcase and the shirt on my back, and went to work at Aherns department store before joining the Army Reserves.

I was unaware of my Aboriginal heritage until I began my career with the Community and Child Health Service Department in 1973. Through my work I met a member of my clan, and that chance meeting led to a discovery that shaped the rest of my life.

My passion is finding ways to work with the government and the community to support Aboriginal and other disadvantaged groups – and ensure their access to health, housing and education. Today, I lead Keystart's Social Lending Scheme and Chair the Aboriginal Lands Trust.

I was raised in orphanages and educated at Clontarf Boys Town, I had no family, no tender love and care, but I was given something very valuable - an education. That education has allowed me to travel a long and challenging journey since leaving the gates of Clontarf.

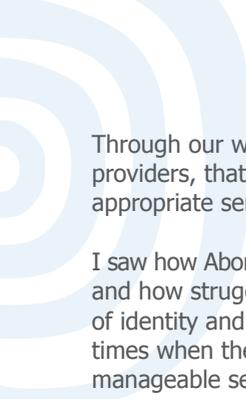
It has given me the confidence and grounding I needed to go on to lead initiatives in social justice, health, education, housing, employment and Aboriginal affairs.

When I spent the holidays with a kindly foster family, I saw the love, care and effort that went into a family. I saw how working hard ensured there was always food on the table, a roof over their heads, nice cars and clothes and plenty of love to go around. I wanted that for myself, for my future.

I began my working life in an era influenced by a lack of cultural awareness about how best to work with and support Aboriginal communities; no knowledge whatsoever about the specific health needs of Aboriginal people and a deep sense of mistrust between Aboriginal people and white Australian health care providers.

I am proud to say that a great deal has changed – for the better – in my lifetime. I joined the public service as a health worker in the 1970's after being inspired by my now wife Teresa, an Aboriginal nurse, to help others.





Through our work, I saw how Aboriginal people struggled to communicate with health providers, that people didn't know what services were available to them or how to access appropriate services.

I saw how Aboriginal people were disconnected from white Australian society and their lands and how struggling with having a home, education or a job affected people's sense of identity and ability to deal with the basics like good food and hygiene. There were times when the challenges seemed insurmountable. I just broke down the issues into manageable sections, put my head down and tried to come up with one solution at a time.

Through my studies at Curtin University I was selected to go to Salt Lake City USA on a Rotary Exchange Program. There I learnt about Indigenous health, housing and education programs and it's where I got my first real taste of practical, self-determining programs that really worked to improve the everyday lives of Indigenous people. I saw how Indigenous communities were starting to develop and run their own health initiatives.

I realised that it didn't matter how much funding the government provides - these programs only work when the funding is used by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people need to own the process and the outcomes.

As my career progressed I became involved in Aboriginal housing and government affairs. I realised that everything was interconnected – without safe and secure housing, Aboriginal people lacked the basic environment for good health.

A home provides the stability youth need to go to school and gain an education. It's important to recognise that Aboriginal people are disadvantaged, in many cases, by ongoing discrimination, poverty, cultural differences and broken homes. Aboriginal people suffer from decades of resentment and racism that has damaged family relations, resulted in substance abuse and caused mental health issues. But moving forward, Aboriginal people need to take charge of our own health, improve our wellbeing and give our children the best possible start in life.

Together, we can help our people take control our destiny. The problems of the past can no longer be a determinant of our future. The key to breaking the cycle is education. Not just for young people but also their parents, if we could truly engage parents, we'd have a real head start in closing the gap and putting the trauma and disadvantage of earlier generations behind us.

I want to see our youth and our people take pride in themselves; not just for what we were, as the first people of this country, but also what we can be - self-determining and in charge of our own destinies.

Shelley Cable

Kaya! My name is Shelley Cable and I am a senior consultant who works with lots of different organisations to achieve better outcomes for our mob, like employment, engagement and business success. I'm 23, **Noongar**, grew up in Perth and live in Canberra now.



I'm passionate about promoting Indigenous people in business and finance, because I think it's really important for Indigenous people to understand and be in control of money.

In my opinion, money is power, so I want Indigenous people to be in control of it so we can influence decisions and create better lives for our mob (imagine what we could do if our Indigenous organisations and families had more money to spend on the things that matter to us!)

I studied business at Curtin University after high school, and worked a few different jobs in the areas of finance and Indigenous community engagement. In 2016 I was named Miss NAIDOC Perth, and last year I was invited to attend the United Nations in Switzerland, where I presented on the importance of finance and how it can help us express our human rights as Indigenous people.

One of the scariest decisions I ever made was in 2016, when I was 21. I'd just won Miss NAIDOC Perth, and loved all the public speaking and community engagement I got to do. But, I also had a full-time job in finance, and I wasn't impressing my boss with all the hours I spent away from the office, even though I worked really hard and made up the missing hours. I knew I had to make a decision between Miss NAIDOC and my job, so I started getting advice from friends and family about what to do. At some point, I eventually realised: I have a dream job. But it's someone else's dream job, not mine.

I decided to do what my heart told me to and follow my passions. I took six months leave from my job but I still worked really hard, reading research papers on Indigenous business, talking to people in industry, and doing serious community engagement, and I absolutely loved it. My network allowed me to travel Australia, speaking at various conferences, I stayed with my friends in different cities to save money, and eventually bumped into someone from a company that worked in my area of passion.

A few months later, they offered me a full-time position; just two weeks before I was due to go back to my old job! Now, I work for PwC's Indigenous Consulting.

Since then, I haven't looked back! I've moved to Canberra, I'm working in MY dream job, I've presented at the UN, and achieved heaps of things I never would have done if I hadn't had the courage to prove everyone wrong, leave the safety net of my old job, and get busy changing the world.

In my opinion, being a good leader is about two things: caring about others, and fiercely chasing your own dreams. Caring about others is important because you aren't a leader if no one wants to follow you. Chasing your dreams is about being authentic, because people get inspired when they see you being passionate and fierce about chasing down your goals.

If you're in high school right now, take some time out on your weekend, and step back from your assignments/tests/exams. Don't forget your grades, of course, because studying and learning new things is an important skill (not just in school, but during your whole life) – just remember there are some seriously important issues in our communities and in the world that need your attention too.

Imagine yourself when you're 20, or 40, and think about what in the world you want to have changed. What problem do you see, that you want to solve? It might be gender equality, the justice system, disease, climate change... Spend some time (it might take a few months of reflecting... it took me six!) to figure out what ignites your fire. What makes you angry? Passionate? Then, learn as much as you can about it and go fix it.

Gordon Cole

My name is Gordon Cole and I am an entrepreneur in the business and community space. I am a **Noongar** man, I grew up in the northern suburbs of Perth, I worked in federal and state government trading entities and agencies, from Australia Post, Aboriginal Affairs, Child Protection, Community Development and Justice along with being in social enterprise for 20 years.



I have been in leadership roles for over 25 years where I have successfully led and played a key role in the establishment of a number of community not for profit organisations including the Wirrpanda Foundation, Noongar Mia Mia Pty Ltd (housing organisation), Noongar Wellbeing and Sports and The Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry. As a traditional owner negotiator I played an active role in the Noongar Native Title Negotiations of the South West Settlement, the first of its kind in Australia. The last ten years I have successfully built a number of businesses and have won numerous awards. My advice:

Pace yourself, don't go too fast and try to get everything at once, trust me it'll come, you'll get there!... Listen and observe more than you speak. Get to know and understand your culture, your heritage and where you come from, this is your foundation for everything.

I work in a number of areas across a broad spectrum of sectors and industries but primarily I work towards improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. I do the work that I do because it's very much needed to improve life outcomes for our people. One of the things that I enjoy most about my work is seeing people and communities thrive to be the best they can be to maximise their untapped potential.

My old people, my four children and the impact that colonisation has had on our community have inspired me to do the work that I do. To be successful I have had to be better educated, change my thinking and become healthier (both spiritually and physically).

To me, good leadership is about having a vision, a plan to execute it and having good people around you.

The major aspect of good leadership is being consistent. My strengths as a leader include: consistency, honesty, passion, being a good listener, having a work ethic, showing emotion, being empathetic and understanding. I always do what I say I will.

An example of my leadership is when I was the Inaugural Chairperson of our housing company and after three years I stood aside to allow a younger person to become the chairperson, I stayed on as a director and over a 13-year period I along with others mentored, guided and supported the younger person on his journey as chairperson along with his personal and professional life. He has gone onto bigger and better things across all facets of his life and was able to be nurtured by myself and others to reach his potential. Social and community housing is a very emotive and political area to work in, he conducted himself professionally with honesty and integrity.

Throughout his 13 years as our chairperson I was able to provide solid support and guidance along with expertise that was transferable to him, allowing him to learn and grow at a steady pace where he was able to understand and learn the discipline of policies, procedures and guidelines to great effect. 18 months ago I took over the chairperson role after he resigned to pursue other things, this was very rewarding as now he is mentoring and supporting young people as they commence their life journey.

If I could go back and give some advice to my high school aged self, I would say: Work and study hard...I didn't do this! I learnt a bit later that there is no substitute for hard work, my parents advised me of this but I didn't listen! Don't waste your time thinking you know the shortcuts because there are none! It will save you and everyone around you time if you focus on your studies and training... Set personal and professional goals. Learn to save and value money early in your life...work to become financially secure, it provides you with more options. Most importantly, be consistent, be honest, act professionally with integrity, present well and be respectful.

Rishelle Hume

My name is Rishelle Hume AM and I am a proud **Noongar** woman with traditional ties to the **Whadjuk, Ballardong and Gnaala Karla Booja** peoples and a mother of three children. I am the direct descendent and granddaughter of the highly respected Noongar Wadjuk Elders, Patrick and Lorna Hume who spent their lives tirelessly promoting Aboriginal rights and their Noongar culture. Like my grandparents, I have devoted my working life to the advancement of Aboriginal people and my Noongar culture.



As a young person I remember lining up for food vouchers on many occasions and being reliant on hand outs from others. However, with the encouragement of my grandparents, family and friends, I learnt how to identify and embrace the opportunities that were presented to me, including the importance of gaining a quality education. The greatest inspiration in my life has been my grandparents. They were both heavily involved in the advancement of Aboriginal people in the late 1970's and 80's, which was a time where Aboriginal people had to fight for every basic human right from health care, equal employment opportunities, education and housing to name a few. I grew up watching my grandparents spending their lives promoting Aboriginal rights and Noongar culture within both government departments and the wider community. Because of their positive influence on me, I have been driven to enhance and improve opportunities for Aboriginal people in all areas within the community. I strive to keep their legacy alive and to ensure Aboriginal people have a voice.

I have over 25 years' experience in Aboriginal engagement ranging from employment, education and justice to health. In 2000 I decided I wanted to further my education, so I completed a Bachelor of Commerce degree with a Double Major in Human Resource Management which led me to my current role as A/Aboriginal Employment Manager with Chevron Australia. I am part of a team that is dedicated to boosting Aboriginal participation by investing in long-term education, employment and business development opportunities. Every day, we work with community leaders, traditional owners, schools and training providers to create education pathways resulting in employment opportunities for the next generation of Australian Aboriginals.

Outside of my full-time employment, I am married and a mother of three beautiful children. My biggest achievement and ultimate inspiration for everything I do is my family.

My culture defines who I am and has been the primary influence on this journey I am on. I have a responsibility to make a difference for my people as an Aboriginal leader; the social and moral obligation that comes with community leadership is life-long. Those who lead, who have authority, must care for and look after those who come behind.

I have a real passion and focus on helping grow leadership capabilities for Aboriginal women through the Western Australian Aboriginal Leadership Institute. I am working alongside Robyn Smith-Walley towards expanding and developing other programs such as governance, financial literacy, youth programs and men's programs. Effective leadership is fundamental in helping achieve a better future for Aboriginal people. We need to foster and nurture a new generation of Aboriginal leaders. We need to grow Aboriginal leadership capabilities so that we can create a future for my people where we no longer talk about "closing the gap" because there is no gap to close.

My advice is that you can do anything you set your mind to. Believe in yourself and have the vision, passion and dedication to make a difference. Keep your eye on the destination, stay determined always, remain confident and adapt along the way, as there are and will be many obstacles and road blocks that challenge you. Match your vision with something you are passionate about. Something that keeps you engaged every moment of everyday, to bring you one step closer to the success that you desire.

I also strongly believe that it is important to surround yourself with the thinkers, doers and believers and most importantly with people that see greatness in you, when you sometimes don't see it in yourself. We all need to take accountability to build on and progress positive changes within the community for Aboriginal people. We need to create a shared future, with hope, optimism and purpose. I hope you will walk with me and have the courage to make a difference for the better. We can all do this together!

Cheryl Kickett-Tucker

My name is Professor Cheryl Kickett-Tucker and I am a Research Fellow at Curtin University and the Project Director/coach Kaat Koort n Hoops (after hours) at Koya Aboriginal Corporation. I am also the Founding Director of Pindi Ltd, Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Wellbeing. I am a **Wadjuk Noongar** Traditional Owner, social psychological research scientist, children's fiction writer and community development practitioner.



My work life is uplifting and purposeful because I am focused on using my passion and ability to help those who are less fortunate and whom are vulnerable. I believe that our vulnerable families have a right to live a life and to live it safely and in thriving conditions. Our community is a living legacy that determines our purpose in life. Members of our community remind us that although they are vulnerable and in need of help, they too have strengths, talents, knowledge, experience and skills as well. It is my purpose to reveal these assets to the people themselves so that they can view themselves and their talents with a positive lens. By doing this, our people are then of the journey to self-capacity building where they can take the reins of their lives and steer in the direction that they want to do. They are in control of their lives and no matter how many departments or services come and go in their community over time, they are skilled and confident to continue their life's journey to wellbeing, prosperity and fulfillment.

The most rewarding part of my work is ensuring the research I conduct is translated to the grass roots people. At my basketball wellbeing program called Kaat Koort n Hoops, the most pleasure I get is seeing the happy faces of children who are part of our Kaat Koort n Hoops family, not just their team. I am proud of the collective of individuals who participate, support and help and who are from over 15 different nationalities, abilities and experiences. It's wonderful and humbling to see children and young people make friends, play together and learn from each other.

I love my work and my words of encouragement are...

Be happy about yourself first and foremost.

Be happy about your work. Choose a career not just a job.

Follow your passion. Look for a career that showcases your strengths, your talent and your passion.

Then you will have a purpose which will see you truly experience fulfillment and happiness.

I'm inspired by my parents who both are respective leaders and despite the struggles they endured...they persisted. I'm also inspired by my own children. Life is difficult for many people who are poor, unsupported and who feel unvalued in this world. These people also inspire me to do my best to rattle and change the system that jails their lives.

To become successful in my field, the biggest challenge is being an Aboriginal woman in a non-Aboriginal male world. I haven't overcome this challenge as I am still navigating the space. Some days it's really hard to keep up the fight and be heard, be taken seriously with my ideas being recognised and put in action. Some days it's easier especially when I can share my feelings with others in the same situation. Together, we support each other and build up our ammunition ready for the next fight.

My strengths as a leader include that I value people. I believe in other's strengths. I am honest and transparent. I have time to listen, to support, to motivate, to inspire. I truly care about others. I hope I am a beacon for others in their journey of life. I have an open mind and crave to keep on learning from others. I believe and ensure the rights of Aboriginal people and especially children from all identities is acknowledged, heard and respected.

Be bold. Be bright. Be you!

To me, a good leader is a role model who does what they say and says what they do. Integrity is an important element of good leadership. Other aspects are knowing the strengths and assets of co-workers and providing spaces for co-workers to use their strengths and assets. As leaders, it is our role to know our co-workers, to provide that safe space, to deeply listen, thus providing an open platform for personal dialogue. Once we know our co-workers, then the vision we are striving for in the workplace is truly shared and reachable.

My advice to my high school self is that it's ok if you don't assume the person that society wants you or expects you to be. Being unique is a wonderful attribute and you must continue your path whilst acknowledging the characteristics of your uniqueness. Use your characteristics to learn from others and to learn about yourself. Do not be frightened to be who you truly are, to show your talents and don't listen to the noise from others in your journey.

Ken Wyatt AM MP

My name is Ken Wyatt AM and I am a proud **Noongar, Yamatji and Wongi** man and was elected in 2010 as the Federal Member for Hasluck, the first Aboriginal Member of the House of Representatives.



In 2015, I became the inaugural First Nations member of the Federal Executive after being sworn in as Assistant Minister for Health, and in January 2017, I became the first Aboriginal Minister to serve in a Federal Government, after being appointed Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Indigenous Health. My portfolio responsibilities also include Australian Hearing Services and organ and tissue donation, through the Organ and Tissue Authority.

Before entering politics I worked in the fields of health and education including as District Director for the Swan Education District, and Director of Aboriginal Health in New South Wales and Western Australia.

In 1996 I was awarded the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours list for my contribution to the wider community in training and mentoring young people. Later, in 2000, I was awarded a Centenary of Federation Medal for 'efforts and contribution to improving the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and mainstream Australian society in education and health'.

Charles Perkins and Lowitja O'Donoghue have been exemplars for me. I have always been fascinated by people who become the person who leads a group. You take attributes of good people and you learn to use them in the way you operate and the way in which you make decisions, not just for yourself but for those you are responsible for.

As a Commonwealth Minister, my leadership role is a national position. However, I find that I operate on a Rotary Club ethos, and that is "service above self". By making decisions on that principle, you will more often than not, make the right decision.

Leaders also need to understand that they will also make mistakes but you must accept that mistake, learn from it and turn it next time into a positive way forward. Leadership is about guiding, directing and taking people with you. It's complex, yet it's simple.

In our families, our father or our mother tends to be the leader and we tend to listen and follow. We aren't always obedient, and we get punished, but generally the principles of leadership are being in a pivotal role where you can influence those around you and influence the future - showing tough love when it's needed but, equally, being prepared to acknowledge that others' ideas can be different to yours.

The key things you have to attain as a leader are:

- Integrity and passion but with a degree of hardness when necessary.
- Gaining the respect of those you influence.
- A sense of humility and humanity, so when you make decisions it is not just about you but about the broader community of interests.

Speak up and don't be shy, and don't be afraid of your convictions.

Follow them through, though sometimes peer pressure is tough to deal with. Learn the art of listening. Listen carefully and also listen with your eyes. And then, step forward. Be prepared to acquire new knowledge, be prepared to embrace the understandings that will help you become a better leader in any sphere of work. That's what I have done, through accepting my limitations, but knowing that I can step outside of them in order to be a pathfinder for reform and change.

"History is about stories of where we come from and to know them is to understand where we are going. To know our history is to foster pride and self-esteem in our identity and make us what we are today – it is the foundation on which to build strong family values for our future generations. Knowing about our past and our history ensures the way is paved for our children to nurture strong identities for their own future and destiny. Let the stories echo down through our generation to make sure that our story is never lost or forgotten."

Carol Petterson JP

Menang/Ngadju Elder of the Noongar Nation

Njaki Njaki/Balardong

Mikayla King

My name is Mikayla King and I work in education. I am a 23 year old **Kalkadoon, Indjalandi-Dhidhanu** and Dutch woman.

When I was 18 I began working within the Department of Education as an Aboriginal Islander Education Officer. I saw first-hand the disappointing situation of Aboriginal education, the gaps compared to non-Aboriginal peers and the lack of understanding in this space. As a result I was inspired to complete a four year Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood studies) where I gained a wealth of knowledge on child development, teaching pedagogy and the position of our national curriculum. Through my study I won two big awards; ECU Vice Chancellor award and ICC Leadership award. During this time, I began engaging with schools to support them on their journey to become culturally responsive educators and support their students, families and communities.

In 2016, I started Aboriginal Education Solutions. I have presented at conferences, schools, universities and TAFE. I have held positions on Aboriginal organisation working groups, school councils and committees. I take my role in Aboriginal education seriously and will continue to seek opportunities to empower those around our community.

As a group of people who have been disempowered for a long time I feel it is important to use my skill set and knowledge to empower our community. I do this in ways such as: Co-Creator of 100 Days of Deadly Mob, previous Miss NAIDOC Manager, Mentor for Girls Academy, and alumni/committee member of the Western Australian Aboriginal Leadership Institute.

It is hard to choose one moment that defines leadership for me. I feel this way because leadership to me is not moments where I stand on a pedestal and self-promote or direct the behaviour of people. Leadership to me is the consistent endeavour to empower, mentor and provide opportunities for the growth of self and those around you.



When I think of my own definition and times that have defined my leadership it would be in my previous role of Miss NAIDOC Manager where I worked with a team to provide an incredible opportunity for Aboriginal women, or in those subtle moments with my students when I support them as they grow to be leaders that are resilient and powerful.

My advice would be to make self-care and healthy boundaries a priority. I say these both because it is important that we nurture our own social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

By setting boundaries we are able to be safe, nurtured and healthy to support our communities. When offering advice to young people in particular, I always remind them of the power of education. We are in unique positions to use our cultural knowledge and western knowledge to empower ourselves and our communities. Always, demonstrate commitment to opportunities and use them to grow in skill set and in academia.

Paulina Motlop

My name is Paulina Motlop, I am the Director of the Aboriginal Education Teaching and Learning Directorate at the Western Australian Department of Education. I have taught and led in schools in Darwin before joining the University of Western Australia as an Assistant Professor within the School of Indigenous Studies.

Mum is of the **Kungarakan and Yanyuwa** First Nation peoples of the Northern Territory and Dad is non-Aboriginal whose family grew up in and around Cottesloe and Mosman Park.



I am focused on transforming the understanding and sharing the strength of Indigenous knowledges, values and being, and valuing the importance of equity and diversity as strengths and a resource in individuals, schools and communities.

My advice to young people would be:

Look into the future with hope and enjoy and cherish the present..... you belong and you are connected, you have purpose. Find the 'you'.....identify your strengths and build on them.....nourish and maintain important relationships with young people and adults in your life and look back on your life with a sense of accomplishment. I did it, and I did it well.

Dennis Eggington

My name is Dennis Eggington, I am a **Nyoongar** man from the south-west region of Western Australia; an Adjunct Professor and the CEO of the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia Ltd.



I have dedicated my life to working with and for my people, to advance the rights of Indigenous peoples in this country. I am a proud father and grandfather, and I continually strive to protect and promote the human rights of First Nations Peoples.

As the eldest grandchild in my mother's very large extended family it was just expected that I'd be the spokesperson, a mediator, an advocate. I didn't question that because I just saw it as my role, which led onto other leadership positions as a young man, such as school captain and an activist speaking out about banning nuclear testing in the Pacific.

I rarely refer to myself as a leader but do accept that many of my actions are perceived by others as leadership. I have always had a burning desire to use my skills, knowledge and passion to work with our community. If that constitutes leadership, then it's a label I'm comfortable with. I'm fortunate to have learnt so much from wonderful Elders, leaders and community members during my years in WA, NSW and the Northern Territory, where, as a young teacher I confronted the full extent of systemic racism, which drove me to stand proud and strong and face racism head on, a trait that has stayed with me for life.

Leadership is much more than being a charismatic personality. You can't afford to lead people up the garden path or support causes that have evil intent.

We need future leaders who can stand tall and be proud in our Culture and law.

Don't be frightened to make the hard choices, because they are the choices which will shape your future and challenge you. You don't become a leader by taking the easy road, in fact I would describe my own journey as a roller coaster ride, but I am extremely proud of my achievements throughout life.

Good leaders need to have good hearts and good souls.

In the case of leadership in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the requirements are even more onerous. It's difficult to separate the issues of leadership in a non-Aboriginal world and the need for understanding of our First Nations Cultural world.

What I do know, is that you are a leader through your actions, not just because you wear the label. Some people are fortunate to be born or thrust into positions where leadership is required, and to their credit, they put their hand up or their best foot forward. However this should not discourage any of our young people from aspiring to become the next generation of leaders in our community.

I have a firm belief that our emerging leaders will change the very nature of our country, a country that has exited colonisation and is re-born with a new partnership between us as First Peoples and the settler society.

I can only see greatness coming from our young people who have inherited a strength of resilience and determination to take hold of this country and show the world that we are in fact some of the world's best leaders.

*"Nobody does YOU better than YOU.
You are unique and have something to offer the world that nobody else does. It is this that sets you apart from the rest, so embrace everything that you are and back yourself in all that you dream to do."*

Ingrid Cumming

Community engagement Specialist, City of Canning

Whadjuk Noongar

Glenda Kickett

My name is Glenda Kickett and I am the Manager, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Engagement and Therapeutic Services - Aboriginal Children and Families at the Australian Childhood Foundation. I am a **Whadjuk and Ballardong Nyungah** and connected to many Nyungah families across Nyungah country through my family.



I have over 20 years' experience as a social worker managing programs in out-of-home care and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families where they have had ongoing contact with Child Protection and Family Support. The programs I managed ensured the children and young people's care, cultural, social and emotional needs were met while in care and contact with their families; and supported families with issues and concerns by providing intensive family support and early intervention, family enhancement and reunification.

I see many strengths in our cultures, family kinship systems and the way we view our world which can be applied to how services should work with our families to build relationships and trust.

I have used cultural ways of working to build relationships and connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and children and young people, to support and advocate for them with other service providers and the Department. I am inspired to work in out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people because their stories are my story. The challenge is advocating for their cultural needs and cultural ways of working with our families, because culture is not viewed as a strength in government services.

I am passionate about our culture, our children and young people and the possibilities of what can be achieved for our future when we talk with one voice and walk the journey together; and how we bring others on that journey. I started off as the interim Chairperson of NAIDOC Perth, but, ten years later I am still here. The other members saw qualities in me to lead the organisation which made me start to believe in myself. I initiated the Miss NAIDOC Perth Empowerment and Leadership program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women which culminates in the crowning of Miss NAIDOC Perth. I am proud of all the young women who have participated in the program. I have responsibility to the other committee members, our members and community, funding bodies and sponsors and to be inclusive of all to organise our events.

Our organisation is a group of volunteers who have built up the events to become a significant part of NAIDOC Week in Perth.

I think good leadership is about building the strengths and capacity of others, especially children and young people so they gain the confidence and self-esteem to feel they can achieve anything. My strength as a leader is, I am a good listener and when you listen to the stories of others, you learn from them which is inspiring.

The advice I would give to my high school self is: **you will get there, keep believing in yourself.** This gives hope for the future. I was in care and felt very insecure and shy, lost and lonely and had a lot of self-doubt about my identity and culture.

If you are interested in advocating for change in the lives of people and communities, become a social worker. There are opportunities to work in community and cultural development, education, health, human rights and social justice.

My other advice is **always set a goal for yourself and don't give up, you will get stronger, just keep going.**

"You are AMAZING! Don't be afraid to ask for help, we are here to support you and encourage you— Our Future Leaders."

Robyn Smith-Walley

Aboriginal Productions and Promotions owner, co-founder/co-chairperson of Western Australian Aboriginal Leaderships Institute

Wilmen Nyoongar

Ian Trust

My name is Ian Trust I am an Aboriginal man from the **East Kimberley** and the Executive Chair of Wunan Foundation. Wunan Foundation's charter is to achieve Aboriginal social and economic reform through education, housing and employment.



“Nothing shapes our lives so much as the questions we ask, refuse to ask or never dream of asking.

Our minds, bodies, feelings and relationships are literally informed by our questions.” Sam Keen

My whole working life (apart from my apprenticeship as a diesel mechanic) has been working in positions involving Aboriginal affairs, including WA Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority, Commonwealth Aboriginal Development Commission and ATSIC. I have always had a strong social conscience and a belief that the Aboriginal people of Australia should enjoy the same standard of living as other Australians. Australia is a rich country and there is no reason why a big percentage of the Aboriginal people should be living in poverty (by Australian standards).

After I completed my apprenticeship as a diesel mechanic in the early 1970's, Aboriginal community development was just starting in the Kimberley and I saw it as a better means to achieving Aboriginal empowerment through economics and getting our people to organise themselves. My first major challenge was learning about finance to the depth required to run a community organisation like a business. My other major challenge was public speaking but it improved as my general knowledge increased. What I enjoy most about my field of work is that it's challenging, it's rewarding and the outcomes I achieve benefit other people. The power of my work is the knowledge that I can influence how society looks 50 years from now but if I only influence a small section of the community my efforts would not have been in vain.

I associate leadership with knowledge, wisdom, courage, compassion and dignity but it's really about helping people discover the power they have to change their life or the lives of others. Leadership should be about creating the environment for people to flourish and create the life they want. My strengths as a leader can be summarised as consistency, persistence, determination, having a vision and belief.

The biggest leadership initiative I have undertaken in my life so far (along with other East Kimberley leaders) has been supporting the introduction of the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) in Kununurra and Wyndham by the Federal Government. The introduction of the CDC has been extremely controversial to say the least but it is an attempt by Aboriginal people to support a policy which is different from what we have been doing for the last 50 years. I believe that if we want to achieve better outcomes in the future for our people we must do things differently. Support for any new strategy always takes time to build and I believe this will be the case with the CDC. Any new social reform initiatives always require a small committed leadership group to drive change and without this leadership group no new ideas would ever be attempted. It is only after more people come to understand what you are trying to do over time that support goes up. This was also the case with the introduction of alcohol restrictions in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. Nothing worth achieving is ever easy but if it's important to you, you must be prepared to back it and support it and stick at it. There is saying that says "If you want to have things you have never had before you must be prepared to do things you've never done before." I think there is a lot of truth in that.

If I could go back and give some advice to my high school self it would be:

- **Read and read to increase knowledge**
- **Learn how to manage your money! VITAL**
- **Watch your habits and your friends**
- **You must give to get**
- **Develop a work ethic and be passionate.**

If a young person was interested in my area of work, I would tell them that working with people is always tough and it takes time to build trust and rapport. It's important to be consistent in how you deal with people and having good, clear communication skills is crucial.

Sharon Davis

My name is Sharon Davis, I am the Team Leader of Aboriginal Education at Catholic Education Western Australia and a proud Aboriginal woman, from both the **Bardi and Kija peoples** of the Kimberley.

I am a trained primary school teacher through the University of Notre Dame's Campus of Reconciliation in Broome and have a Master of Science in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition from the University of Oxford in the UK.



I work in Aboriginal education as I believe that knowledge is the key to life's successes and that our children deserve equitable access to an education that is both outstanding and culturally responsive, to enable Aboriginal students to reach outcomes comparable to that of their non-Aboriginal peers. I started my journey in Aboriginal education after figuring out that what I was learning in school about my own people didn't seem to fit with what I knew. As a young Aboriginal girl, I couldn't relate to the anthropological-line archetype my school taught me about my mob. It didn't make sense to me that our people could thrive since the beginning of time by roaming aimlessly in a barren land. I knew something was missing, and my ability to question what was taught to me pushed me into university and into the teaching profession.

The journey has been difficult, particularly when navigating the schooling system, particularly high school. My mum was sent thousands of kilometres away from her country to attend a city high school, where she only went to Year 10. Her mother was trained as a domestic servant in a Kimberley mission, as was her mother before her. I had to overcome a historically-based broken relationship between my family and an education system that did not deem us worthy of a real education. My determination for a better life for me, my children and my people helped keep me steadfast on my educational journey.

When people ask me about being an Aboriginal leader, I get very uncomfortable. I have never considered myself an Aboriginal leader, but rather an Aboriginal woman in a leadership position. Aboriginal women, such as myself have a distinctive role leading change in large organisations. Not only are we a minority in terms of our Aboriginality, but also as women in leadership positions. Understanding and strengthening our identity, in and across both of these areas of marginalisation is important for building leadership skills that cater for our unique circumstances.

Participating in an Aboriginal women's leadership course enabled me to network with other Aboriginal women who faced the same leadership challenges I faced. In some instances we talked about racism, in others it was sexism, and we often yarned about the combination of the two. Through this avenue I have met and formed relationships with many strong Aboriginal women in leadership positions who continue to support me on my leadership journey today. Following the journeys of other Aboriginal women, such as Dr Anita Heiss, Dr Chelsea Bond, Dr Megan Davis and Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson help to keep me inspired on my pathway.

As an Aboriginal woman in a leadership role, **I remain strong by reminding myself that my mother, her mother, and all my mother's before them, back until the beginning of time, fought through and overcame adversity.**

I stand on the shoulders of strong Aboriginal women with the work that I do today, and they are always with me to make sure I remain the course.

I would encourage teenage me to speak up and speak out, often and unapologetically. I would let me know that later on in life, I will be teaching the teachers about the true history of Australia, so why not get them thinking now. I would encourage teenage me to join and lead school committees, and that is doesn't matter that you will be the only Aboriginal person in the group. I would tell me that it is OK to feel mad about what happened and still happens to our people, and it is not OK for adults to make you feel like you are not allowed to be angry about it. I would teach me how to navigate and master an education system that does not cater for difference, so I can go to university through a direct entry pathway. I would tell me to stay proud, to stay strong, and to stay deadly.



Ground Floor, 1 Alvan Street, Subiaco WA 6008

Phone: (08) 6213 2297 **Email:** info@ccyp.wa.gov.au

ccyp.wa.gov.au

2018
Talking Leadership
Designed by: Harkey Richards