

## 2022 'Yamatji On-Country' Meeting Wednesday, 12 and Thursday, 13 October 2022

### Call to Action Statement

#### First Nations Community representatives:

**Tracey Tonga, Donna Ronan, Evelyn Ronan, Caelene Bartlett, Ben Roberts & Albert Winder**

On behalf of all First Nations peoples gathered here on Southern Yamatji Country at Bundiyarra for the 2022 'Yamatji On-Country' meeting held on Wednesday, 12 and Thursday, 13 October 2022, we make this **Call to Action** Statement:

1. To amplify the urgent need for real action and change across our communities,
2. To mobilise collective change for the betterment of ourselves, our families and our communities; and,
3. To strengthen collaborative partnerships with all community Stakeholders who have shared interests in and across the Midwest, Murchison and Gascoyne regions.

Our **Call to Action** seeks real commitment and investment from all community Stakeholders; and offers an open invitation to work with us, to achieve real and sustainable changes in our communities. As First Nations peoples, we also seek to have equal opportunities and privileges that enable us to be self-determining and afford us our rightful place in leading decision-making processes that impact us.

Through our discussions held yesterday, we have identified and co-designed our **Call to Action** Statement based on the following six (6) key regional priorities in no particular order:

1. Racism (Presented by Shelby Clarke, Trevor Farrell Junior and Christian Wright – Youth Representatives)
2. Housing & Accommodation (Presented by Donna Ronan)
3. Police & Justice (Presented by Albert Winder and Ben Roberts)
4. Education (Presented by Evelyn Ronan & Caelene Bartlett)
5. Employment, Training & Economic Development (Presented by Albert Winder and Ben Roberts); and,
6. Health & Wellbeing (Presented by Tracey Tonga)

Each of our nominated spokespersons will now present these key regional priorities in detail.

We ask all of you, as community members, representatives and delegates of your respective agencies and/or organisations, to respond and commit to our **Call to Action**. Further, we seek commitment from government to report annually against our **Call to Action** Statement, so that we can measure our progress and work together to create change.

## **Racism – Presented by Youth Representative: Shelby Clarke, Trevor Farrell Junior and Christian Wright**

Unfortunately, discrimination and racism remain an ongoing issue that many First Nations peoples still experience today. Systemic discrimination and racism remain embedded in our society and can range from discrete gestures and undertones to direct and confrontational acts of segregation and exclusion. The impact of discrimination and racism is destructive, harmful and causes extreme distress. Being treated adversely because of our race breaches our human rights and is a community priority that we want addressed.

Our starting point and **Call to Action** to address Discrimination & Racism is:

1. Increase education and cultural immersion programs across all areas of community, especially in educational institutions/curriculum, workplaces and government sectors.
2. Improve ethical, cultural and moral standards and censorship across all forms of media, especially social media.
3. Increase the representation of culturally diverse groups, especially First Nations peoples across the community.
4. Enforce a zero-tolerance stance on all forms of discrimination and racism, especially social media.
5. Ensure opportunities for 'Truth-telling' are provided and promoted to re-educate and deconstruct myths and stereotypes; and
6. Become an ally that influences and facilitates opportunities to strengthen relationships between First Nations peoples and the wider community.

## **Housing & Accommodation – Presented by Donna Ronan**

Regional and remote communities across the Midwest, Murchison and Gascoyne regions are experiencing housing shortages, overcrowding and homelessness at alarming rates. The gap between affordable public housing, housing availability and homeownership continues to widen. Public housing waitlists have excessive wait times that further strain the public housing system. The build-up of low socio-economic housing clusters further segregates us as community members and impacts on our sense of community belonging, pride and inclusion. Affordable and secure housing is our citizenship right and is a community priority that we want urgently addressed.

Our **Call to Action** to address our Housing & Accommodation needs are:

1. Review and reduce housing waitlist timeframes.
2. Review and reallocate vacant housing stock, where applicable.
3. Engage a local First Nations advisory board (with equal representatives per language group relevant to community) to assist with reviewing waitlists and allocation of housing.
4. Ensure housing stock is in good condition prior to allocation and placement.
5. Ensure placement is spread across locations, where applicable and not in cluster areas.
6. Increase investment in public housing stock to meet needs of the community.
7. Allocate age-appropriate housing, especially for young people transitioning into independent living.
8. Provide tenancy education programs to educate new and existing primary tenants on their right and obligations, including rental payments, repairs and maintenance, tenant liability, etc.
9. Provide alternative support programs that assist people to address any outstanding tenancy issues and enable them to obtain public housing.
10. Streamline access to housing as part of a prison release re-entry support plan.
11. Increase short term/crisis accommodation, such as hostel/halfway house, especially for prison release, homeless people.
12. Fund, train and employ local First Nations peoples in the Department of Communities (Housing) in key roles.
13. Invest in a Housing Project, that trains and employs local First Nations people to build, renovate and maintain public housing stock.
14. Review and reform the Keystart Home Ownership program to support tenants to transition into home ownership.

## **Police & Justice – Presented by Albert Winder & Ben Roberts**

Community relations between First Nations peoples and the Police and Justice system has remained tense. Over recent years, the international 'Blak Lives Matters' movement has created a platform for First Nations people to raise awareness of the injustice being experienced both currently and historically. Poor community relations with Police, underpinned by systemic discrimination and racism is a significant contributor to the overrepresentation of incarceration rates of First Nations people, especially men. While a cultural shift is occurring within the Police force and Justice system, the pace is inconsistent, ad hoc and is not responsive to the needs of our communities. Being treated in a respectful, fair and just manner is again, a citizenship right and privilege. Our **Call to Action** in relation to this priority is one that requires mutual respect and commitment from all parties.

Our **Call to Action** to address Police & Justice concerns are:

1. Support Police Officers and Justice staff to engage in community events and build positive relationships with local community members, especially First Nations people.
2. Mandate Police officers and Justice staff undertake place-based Cultural Awareness training.
3. Engage local First Nations peoples, especially Traditional Owners and Elders when people come into adverse contact with the criminal justice system.
4. Allocate funding and/or reinstate the Aboriginal Visitors Scheme.
5. Ensure First Nations peoples are informed of their legal and human rights.
6. Ensure Police adhere to correct cultural and community protocols.
7. Restore community confidence by ensuring Police are held accountable for misconduct or wrongdoing.

## **Education – Presented by Evelyn Ronan & Caelene Bartlett**

Education is fundamental to development and lifelong skills. However, although it is a legal requirement that children have access to education, many First Nations children and their parents/families across the Midwest, Murchison and Gascoyne regions continue to be highly disengaged from the education system and are spiralling through the gaps without any intervention. We have identified concerns with teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug use, bullying and violence, and an increase in youth crime and antisocial behaviour. The school community, learning environment and curriculum is not responsive to the learning and development needs of highly disengaged children and young people. Further to this, the lack of culturally secure and responsive re-engagement alternative education programs creates systemic barriers that exclude highly disengaged children and young people. There appears to be a reluctance to take formal action and/or mandatory report parents/families who are not supporting their child/rens education. Ensuring the education and school community is providing a culturally safe and secure learning environment for highly disengaged children and young people is a key priority with our **Call to Action**.

Our **Call to Action** to address the Education needs of our highly disengaged children and young people are:

1. Integrate First Nations culture, heritage, language and history into the curriculum.
2. Increase employment of First Nations teaching staff; and ensure recruitment processes selects suitability qualified person/s who are committed to providing quality education outcomes for students.
3. Have an alternative and culturally responsive re-engagement program for highly disengaged students re-entering the school system, including children and young people re-entering from the juvenile justice system.
4. Have alternative education programs On-Country.
5. Provide intensive support to highly disengaged parents/families to integrate them within the school community and/or their child/ren educational needs.
6. Develop and implement a place-based School Safety Strategy and engages family and community members to assist with managing incidence of bullying and violence in the school; and retains engagement of students in a safe and inclusive way.

## **Employment, Training & Economic Development – Presented by Albert Winder & Ben Roberts**

Employment, training and economic development opportunities for First Nations peoples living in regional and remote areas across the Midwest, Murchison and Gascoyne regions continue to present with ongoing challenges. Many communities are still recovering from the impacts of COVID-19 and the adverse effects to job seeker requirements. Whilst many primary industries were able to maintain stable operations, worker shortages are on the rise. To ensure First Nations peoples are placed in a favourable position to maximise employment, training and economic development opportunities, we have identified investment is required to build our capacity and capability to participate in our local economy as an employee or business operator.

Our **Call to Action** to address the Employment, Training and Economic Development needs across our regions are:

1. Allocate permanent positions within key government agencies and departments, including traineeships and internships.
2. Ensure mentor programs is provided to support job seekers successfully transition and retain employment.
3. Ensure training is relevant to Industry needs.
4. Ensure training delivery and assessment can be person centred to learning and development needs.
5. Ensure First Nations business are given preference for suitable contracts, etc.
6. Increase business support for emerging First Nations business owners/operators.

## **Health & Wellbeing – Presented by Tracey Tonga**

Our physical, social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing health care needs continues to be a priority for community members across the Midwest, Murchison, and Gascoyne regions. Many of us experience issues with access and affordable health care as a result of living in regional and remote areas. The impact of alcohol and drugs places further risks to the mental health needs of many family members. Rehabilitation and healing centres On-Country is in high demand, but resourcing and funding is still lacking. Many of our family members continue to experience barriers with accessing adequate health care which deters them from engaging, placing them at further risk. While some of us have access to our local Aboriginal Medical Service this does not always meet our health care needs. We recognise the need to have access to adequate health services that meet our holistic care needs On-Country.

Our **Call to Action** to address our Health & Wellbeing needs across the regions are:

1. Have a culturally secure Rehabilitation & Family Healing Centre On-Country.
2. Reform the Mental Health Act so that a parent, guardian or primary care giver can have rights to admit an adult child into mental health services and care unit; and/or rehabilitation if their child is mentally incapacitated due to their mental health condition.
3. Increase permanent employment positions for First Nations people in the health sector.
4. Ensure medical staff undertake place-based cultural awareness training.