

Country

FIRST NATIONS
CULTURAL RESOURCES

Good practice guidance

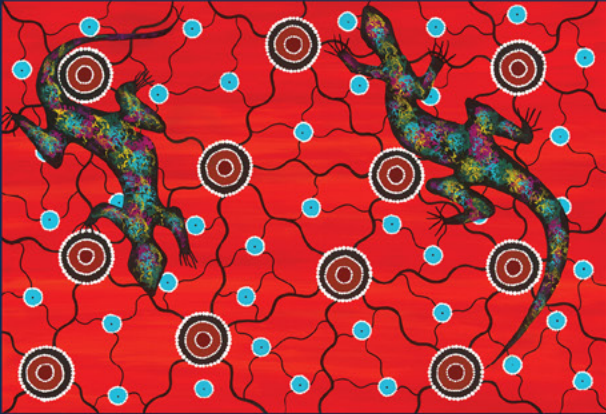


The Centre for
Volunteering

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Artwork Details

Title: *Country*

Artist: Graham Toomey
Wurrumunga Clan of Wiradjuri Nation/
Wongaibon Nation

About: *Country holds a spirit which is old and at all times this spirit heals me, protects me and guides me. When I'm on Country, I feel this old spirit speaking to me and singing to me. The Goanna is the Wiradjuri's people 'totem' which connects us to our creators, ancestors and to our Identity. The Goanna's protect us and guide us through life.*

This artwork captures male and female Goanna's wandering across Country, ensuring all is well and the people are safe. The artwork depicts the colour of the earth along with ancient tracks, which connects clans to each other. The artwork also features old water holes where spirits linger, welcoming those who wish to drink from these old water holes, once they have paid respects and asked for permission.



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Country and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners across Australia. We pay our respect to them and to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the self-determination, resilience, and strength that provides inspiration, care, and support for Aboriginal communities. We also recognise that Aboriginal Peoples have and have always had a strong connection to Country and that their culture is a living Culture that provides richness and cultural value to their communities.



Wiradjuri Country

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Acknowledgements



Barbara O'Neill

Barbara O'Neill CEO, is a proud Dunghutti Woman, raised on Bidjigal Country in NSW. Barbara has worked for eight years for a Community organisation as the Aboriginal Caseworker and as a qualified Indigenous Trauma and Recovery Practitioner. Many of her clients have been Care Leavers. Barbara also sits on the Walama List headed by Justice Warwick Hunt of the NSW District Court. Her capacity is as a Respected Older Person. Barbara has been published in the NSW Jurisprudence Magazine. The subject was Trauma, and the work is now in the New Judge's Handbook and can be found as an Academic article in various search engines.

Barbara has a Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledge majoring in Aboriginal Health and a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Trauma Recovery and Practice as well as a Diploma in Counselling. Barbara is currently engaged in a Master's in counselling. Building journeys of understanding for the non-Indigenous communities via evidence based and trauma informed practice is a passion for Barbara.

Graham Toomey

Graham Toomey is a freshwater man from the Wurrumunga Clan of the Wiradjuri nation and also of Wongaibon Nation. Graham has been the CEO at Gunawirra for the last five years, which is an Aboriginal Community-led organisation in Rozelle. Graham has been with Gunawirra since 2010. In 2010, Graham was Gunawirra's cultural advisor and cultural facilitator who educated and guided staff while also working with the board and management on creating a safe and culturally appropriate place with policies and processors. Gunawirra is supporting over 25 mainly Aboriginal preschools across Sydney and NSW through health and educational programs. Graham has a Diploma of Aboriginal studies and is a practicing visual artist, designer and consultant.

Graham has strong Community ties with the Redfern and Inner West Aboriginal communities as well as rural NSW. Graham has been working as a cultural and art consultant, advisor, facilitator across Sydney for over 20 years and has a wealth of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, contacts and experience.

The Centre for Volunteering

Zac Harold

Manager – Sector Development and Engagement

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Senior Manager – Research, Policy and Advocacy



Glossary

Please be mindful that all people and communities are different. Some communities will have different preferences and meanings for some terms. It is important to ask the individuals and communities that you are working with what terms to use to refer to people, places, and things.

First Nations peoples:

'First Nations peoples' is a term used to represent peoples who are Indigenous to a place. In these resources, First Nations peoples is used specifically to refer to the First Nations people of Australia and is adjacent as a term to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A range of different terms are used in different Communities, including 'First Nations', 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal', and/or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders', and different people prefer different terms. Throughout these resources, 'First Nations', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander(s)' and 'Indigenous Australians' are used interchangeably. This reflects how these communities refer to each other and themselves. It is vital that you always consult with the Elders of a community when you are working or volunteering in a community and ask people how they would like to be addressed. Be mindful that some people do not like certain terms being used to refer to them (e.g. 'Indigenous' is often not preferred because of its association with government labelling).

Country:

'Country' refers to an area of land or sea on which Aboriginal peoples have a traditional or spiritual association. It has a broad meaning which can cover Land, Area, Connectedness to Place/ Sea/Sky/Land/Animals/Plants, Lore, and Community.

Reconciliation:

'Reconciliation' refers to the ongoing journey to create a positive and constructive relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples.

In a just, equitable, and reconciled Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will have the same life chances and choices as non-Aboriginal children, and the length and quality of a person's life will not be determined by their racial background.

Nation:

'Nation' refers to a culturally distinct group of people from a culturally defined area of land.

Kinship:

'Kinship' means identity and belonging in/through a complex system of social connectedness that covers responsibilities, roles, and reciprocal bonds. Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations there are clan groups and within clan groups there are family groups. Kinship is at the heart of Aboriginal culture which links people to one another.

Elders:

'Elders' are highly respected Aboriginal peoples held in esteem by their communities for their wisdom, cultural knowledge and community service. They have gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore. Age alone does not determine whether someone is recognised as an Elder in their community.

Lore:

'Lore' refers to the responsibilities, customs, practices, and cultural knowledge that the Aboriginal peoples learned from the Dreamtime. Aboriginal lore was passed across the generations through knowledge, songs, stories, and dance and it governs all aspects of traditional life.

Mob:

'Mob' is a colloquial term identifying a group of Aboriginal peoples associated with a particular place or Country. It is used to connect and identify who an Aboriginal person is and where they are from. Mob can refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family, relatives, and/or Community.

Community:

A First Nations 'Community' contains people who work together to advocate and support each other to maintain their Community. The community shares and builds a sense of cultural identity and belonging that ensures the community respect each other's differences and values. The same sense of belonging in community is what connects people to the many relationships they develop. Community Elders and leaders within community, work together with community to make decisions that best serves and represent the community.

Culture:

'Culture' is a broad term. It includes cultural knowledge, traditional practices, ways of understanding the world, and methods of expression such as language, celebrations, and events. Culture also relates closely to Country. It is also best to avoid using the term 'lost' when referring to Culture (and/or language) as it passes over the current First Nations cultures and the survival of current First Nations peoples.

Sorry Business:

'Sorry Business' refers to the process of the whole community coming together to share grief and the wider period of cultural practices

following the death of a community member. This allows communities and individuals to mourn the loss properly. This period can last days, weeks, and even months.

Welcome to Country:

A 'Welcome to Country' is delivered by Traditional Owners, (or First Nations peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners) to welcome visitors to their Country. It is a protocol which welcomes visitors a safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during their journey while on the Country of a specific First Nations people group.

Acknowledgement of Country:

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' is an opportunity for anyone (First Nations Person(s) and/or non-Indigenous person(s)) to show respect for Traditional Owners of Country and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country.

Self Determination:

'Self-determination' is the ability to have power and control over your own affairs. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, this means being able to make decisions that affect Community and being able to practice culture.

Self-determination is about being empowered and having freedom and dignity. It also involves recognising and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Nations Peoples with their own decision-making and knowledge systems. Self-determination for Indigenous people is a human right recognised by the United Nations.

Stolen Generations:

'The Stolen Generations' refers to a period in Australia's history where Aboriginal children were removed from their families through government policies. This happened from the mid-1800s to the 1970s.

These children were taken by the police; from their homes; on their way to or from school. They were placed in over 480 institutions, adopted or fostered by non-Indigenous people and often subjected to abuse. The children were denied all access to their culture, they were not allowed to speak their language and they were punished if they did. The impacts of this are still being felt today.

There are currently more than 17,000 Stolen Generations survivors in Australia. Over one third of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are their descendants. In Western Australia almost half

of the population have Stolen Generation links.

The children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations may experience disconnection from their extended families and culture and have high levels of stress. This creates a cycle of trauma, known as Intergenerational Trauma, where the impact is passed from one generation to the next."

Sovereignty:

For First Nations peoples, sovereignty is a spiritual meaning that restrains them to their ancestral lands, (Country or "mother earth"). First Nations peoples were born from their Country and remain attached and connected at all times.

First Nations peoples were self-governing with their own ancestral laws, social structures and systems in place. Sovereignty was never ceded by First Nations peoples, meaning they never consented or agreed to give their country to the invaders, or agreed to live under someone else's laws.

*"... since spiritual belief is completely integrated into human daily activity, the powers that guide and direct the earth are believed to exist with all human life".
The first owners of the land were ancestral beings whose "creativity and incorporation into the land provides the basis for our sovereignty".*

Aileen Moreton-Robinson, in Jack Latimore, *Sydney Morning Herald*

REFERENCES

- Healing Foundation. *Who are the Stolen Generations?* Last accessed May 18, 2023.
Latimore, Jack. *What's Indigenous sovereignty and can a Voice extinguish it?* *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 9, 2023. Last accessed May 18, 2023.



About

These resources have been produced in partnership between Aunty Barbara O'Neill and Graham Toomey, and The Centre for Volunteering. Resource topics and insights have been informed by both The Centre for Volunteering's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group and non-Indigenous members of the NSW volunteering sector.

Developed through a co-design process with Aunty Barb and Graham, the resources seek to ensure that non-Indigenous volunteer-involving organisations are well placed to understand, support, engage and build strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

This information is designed to support people who coordinate, manage and lead volunteers in building relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by providing introductory knowledge to better understand Culture, access reliable information and appropriately work with Community.

To build on these resources it is essential to continue to do the work of listening, learning and being an active supporter of Community. Transparency, honesty and being genuine are keys to long lasting relationships.

Non-Indigenous volunteer-involving organisations should look to build principles of Aboriginal self-determination into ways of working and program delivery. This includes ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are involved in program design and decision-making on services which affect them. Contact your local Aboriginal Community to gather information about your local area.



What is 'Country'?

Country holds a spirit within its landscape – of land, water, sky, and universe. Country is its people, animals, plants, rocks, earth, water, stars and its air.

Country is Earth, Sky, Water, Fire, and Heart.

Country is the source of life and core for Aboriginal identity – an identity that stems from the first sunrise to a continual living culture.

Country sings and speaks to us.

Country is a keeper of secrets. She shares her secrets if you know how to listen.

Country speaks languages that are sophisticated, and of deeply integrated knowledge systems. If you listen to Aboriginal people, you will learn to listen to Country and to feel and hear Country.



Wiradjuri Country

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What it means to be 'On Country'

Being on Country and connecting to Country is deeply spiritual for Aboriginal people. It's a doorway that allows its people to be with their creators and ancestors. Time has no meaning when on Country as they are the past, present, and future; it's what Aboriginal people call, 'everywhen'.

Country reminds its peoples of their Lore, responsibilities to care for Country, and their identity as the first peoples. Country makes its people feel proud, strong, resilient, and determined to face the future even if it looks uncertain and challenging.

"Country is my medicine for healing and for healthy living. I need to be on Country or feel connected to Country at all times. When I'm on Country, I feel healthier, I can breathe better and I can think clearer. Country is me and I am Country".

Graham Toomey, Wiradjuri Nation
and Wongaibon Nation.

What is Identity?

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples tried to hide from their Identity due to fear, government policies, racism, and many other factors. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples felt shame in how First Nations peoples lived and how they were disrespected among coloniser communities. Thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were sent to live on reserves, missions, other government designated areas, or removed from families as part of the Stolen Generations. As a result, many have lost their Identity. They are lost traumatised people trying to find their families, relatives, communities and themselves.

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the Community in which he (she) lives.

Legal definitions of Aboriginality | ALRC

It's comforting to know that in contemporary Australian society, many First Nations people desire to identify themselves and are indeed proud of their heritage. For First Nations people, their identity is who they are, where they come from, feelings of sameness, belonging, and continuity.

Self Determination

Self-determination is the ability to have power and control over your own affairs. For First Nations peoples, this means being able to make decisions that affect Community, using lore and knowledge systems to practice culture. It is about being empowered and having freedom and dignity.

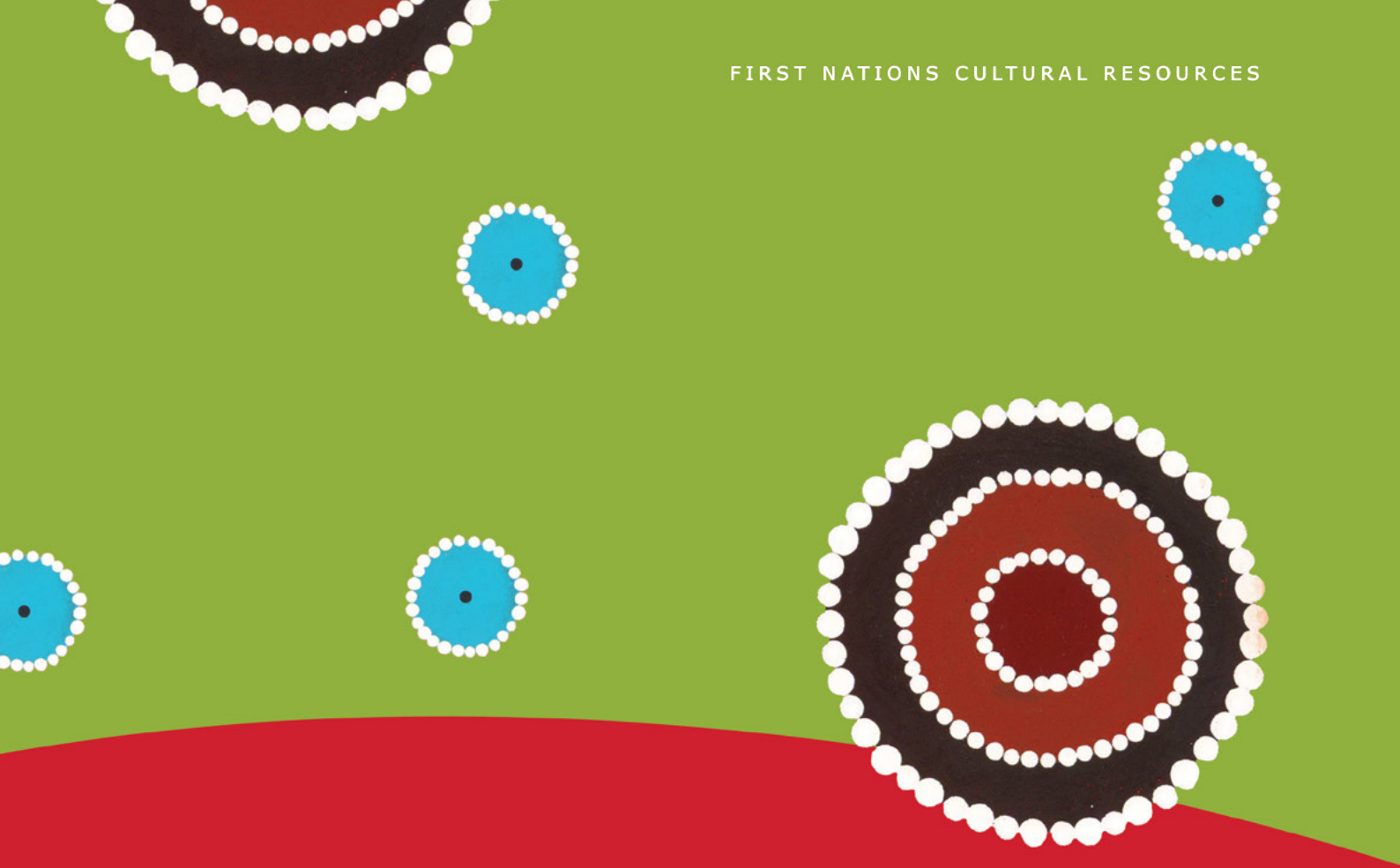
Self-determination is important to Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander peoples as self-determination has been a foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander lives for 65,000 years until the invasion of Australia by the British. Self-determination was forcefully removed from First Nations peoples, mainly through genocide and forced assimilation. Missions were established where the First Nations peoples were deprived of any decision making in regard themselves and their children. Those peoples not placed on Missions were dependent on the largesse of the settler society. Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples have always demanded recognition of their self-determination. It was never ceded.

Useful tips

- To demonstrate that you are genuine and informed in regard First Nations peoples' self-determination, you would easily converse with the Community, you would demonstrate that you are, listening to Community, you would have the hard conversations.
- A good start would be to explain why you are a volunteer in Community if asked. It would be important here to have this conversation with your Manager first.
- Relationships will be slow to develop; you will not necessarily be accepted by everyone in the Community. Results are the key to acceptance.

Sincerity is something that Community can easily detect as much as they can easily detect insincerity. Just keep turning up!





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