

## NAIDOC Week

This week Australia has been celebrating NAIDOC Week, a chance to recognise and give thanks for our First Nation history, culture, traditions and unique contribution to this country. At a time when the Voice Referendum is surfacing cultural and political tension and misunderstanding between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, it is a valuable time for all Australians to make a stand for community, connection and understanding.

This year's theme 'For our Elders' further reminds us of the blessing of our Indigenous culture where Elders are valued and respected for their wisdom, and as holders of the stories and traditions of their people. As Lohoar, Butera & Kennedy note in their study of indigenous communities,

*Elders are generally respected for the value of their cultural knowledge, leadership abilities and for making decisions on behalf of the community. They are particularly valued for helping children to understand the practical aspects of life, society and culture (CFCA Paper No.25. 2014. Strengths of Australian Aboriginal cultural practices in family life and child rearing. 11).*

Walker (1993) highlights the difference approach to elders in Australian society between Indigenous and non-indigenous people:

*the role of Elders is difficult for outsiders to understand. We rely strongly on them as key decision makers within families. They are the people we hold the greatest respect for because many of them went through so much, so that now we do not have to suffer the injustices they experienced. Their guidance is often illustrated*

*through everyday life and their teachings are often done subconsciously; we follow, we observe and we go on to teach our own families. It is through our Elders that the spirit of Aboriginal people is kept alive (ibid. 12)*

This week it has been truly inspiring to hear First Nations' people speaking publicly about the role of Elders in their communities and in their own lives. It is a wonderful reminder of the importance of respect for the experience of those who are older and whose lives have much to teach us. Perhaps we could all, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, take a few moments this week to remember those in our own lives who have gifted us with their care, support and wisdom – parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles, religious Sisters and Brothers and community leaders.

Let's stand with our First Nation's people this week and thank our own Elders, celebrate the wonderful Eldership of Indigenous Australians and look for ways to recognise the value of elders in our families, community and nation.

*I'm an Elder on the ... Elders Council. But I am also an Elder in my community ... and I'm an Elder in my immediate family... So I have three hats—I look after the whole family line ... if they're in any trouble or they need anything in their life ... And I talk to them every day ... I have an open door at home so that if anybody in the community or my family are in trouble, they can come and stay. And I look after them until they're able to be on their own feet (Auntie and Elder, Vic cited in CFCA Paper No.25. 2014. Strengths of Australian Aboriginal cultural practices in family life and child rearing. 13).*

For our Elders – they bless our nation everyday.

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Reflection: How are you celebrating NAIDOC Week in 2023?

*We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which our ministries exist and the Elders both past and present on whose land we walk, work and live. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.*