



City of
Melville

cockburn.wa.gov.au

Media Release

9 June 2022

Cities of Cockburn and Melville recognised by Reconciliation Australia for ground-breaking program that champion First Nations staff

A ground-breaking series of collaborative workshops held by the Cities of Cockburn and Melville to empower staff to support First Nations workmates impacted by racism has been highlighted by Reconciliation Australia.

The joint 'Let's Talk About Racism' initiative features as a case study in Reconciliation Australia's 2021 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Impact Report.

The neighbouring cities are reviewing and renewing their 'Stretch' RAPs over the next 12 months, and plan to include some collaborative actions covering the cities of Cockburn and Melville which often work together on reconciliation projects.

Cockburn was the first Perth metropolitan Local Government organisation to produce a RAP in 2011, with Melville following in 2013.

The staff workshop series demonstrates RAP actions around the priority of Respect, including increasing staff cultural learning and enabling the cities of Melville and Cockburn to build teams inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Beginning as a pilot program in 2020 as a response to the global Black Lives Matter movement, it was further inspired by Reconciliation Australia's theme for National Reconciliation Week that year - 'We are in this together'.

City of Cockburn Family and Community Development Manager Barbara Freeman and former City of Melville Director Community Development Christine Young collaborated with each organisation's Aboriginal community development officers to create the workshops.

The workshops initially functioned as a way to identify and build a more formal network of champions and agents of change, and allies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in both organisations.

Media Release

Ms Freeman said it enabled participating staff to influence other non-Aboriginal staff with their increased awareness and understanding of racism and create cultural competency and safety within the organisations.

“We’ve had a strong focus on truth telling as a means of raising people’s understanding of the true history of white colonisation in Australia and the impact on First Nations peoples,” Ms Freeman said.

“First Nations staff are very central to these workshops, and we usually have a panel at each workshop where they may share their experiences of racism, or what they would want from us as allies.

“We have also had non-Aboriginal staff do some truth-telling about their own family history in Australia from colonisation onwards, as a means of understanding what has taken place in each of our families.

“We have an approach of ‘no blame’ but at the same time an acknowledgement of all non-Aboriginal people having been influenced by unconscious bias and racism.

“We are now taking responsibility for looking at our part in this and how we can bring it to our ‘conscious mind’ and facilitate personal change.”

Ms Young, who will continue to assist the City of Melville on a part-time basis as an Executive Project Officer, said the program initially targeted staff who were already acting as positive allies for First Nations people.

“It now involves Executive staff with Melville and Cockburn’s CEO attending the recent series,” Ms Young said.

“This creates influence and awareness from the top down for a strong broad effect across the organisation.

“We are proud to share that to date, approximately 75 staff across the two local governments have been involved in the workshops. A separate workshop was also held for the WA Local Government Association (WALGA).

“We are currently planning the next series for delivery in June/July this year. This will



City of
Melville

cockburn.wa.gov.au

Media Release

be the fifth series so far, with people keen to get involved after hearing about it from their colleagues.”

City of Cockburn Aboriginal Community Development Officer Marlee Kickett said it was about really listening to Aboriginal people’s experiences of racism.

“It’s about seeing how exhausting it is to constantly try to fix it on our own, when really, it is up to non-Aboriginal people to step up and take action to stop its perpetuation and show compassion and understanding,” Ms Kickett said.

“We know this takes courage, but it is so encouraging for us knowing we have strong, non-Aboriginal people with us as allies”.

Melville Community Development Officer – First Nations engagement Advisor, Leanne Woods said her own knowledge and understanding of how racism worked had been taken to a whole new level and empowered her as an Aboriginal woman.

“It’s been a real honour and privilege to be able to share my thoughts and experiences with everyone,” Ms Woods said.

“It certainly takes a lot out of you after each session and I have been grateful to have opportunities to share/debrief about these after each session.

“It’s been a great opportunity to meet new Aboriginal people who have been part of this amazing journey”.

Read Reconciliation Australia's 2021 RAP Impact Report at the [Reconciliation Australia website](#).

ENDS

For more information contact:
Media and Communications Officer
City of Cockburn
T: 08 9411 3551
E: media@cockburn.wa.gov.au