

ACT Council of Social Service Reconciliation Action Plan 2010-13

Acknowledgement of Traditional Ownership

ACTCOSS acknowledges that Canberra has been built on the lands of the Ngunnawal people. We pay our respects to their elders and recognise the displacement and disadvantage they have suffered as a result of European settlement. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

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Our vision for reconciliation

Our vision for a reconciled Australia is of a nation where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoy the same quality of life as other Australians.

ACTCOSS believes socio-economic parity can be tackled through a process which fully involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We envision a nation which celebrates the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and peoples

and their ongoing contribution to this nation. This is a future where all Australians are proud to have worked collaboratively to overcome inequality and create a fair and equitable community for all.

We begin our journey by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land and pay our respects to their elders, past and present.



Our business

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) was formed in 1963. We are a member of the nationwide COSS network, made up of each of the state Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

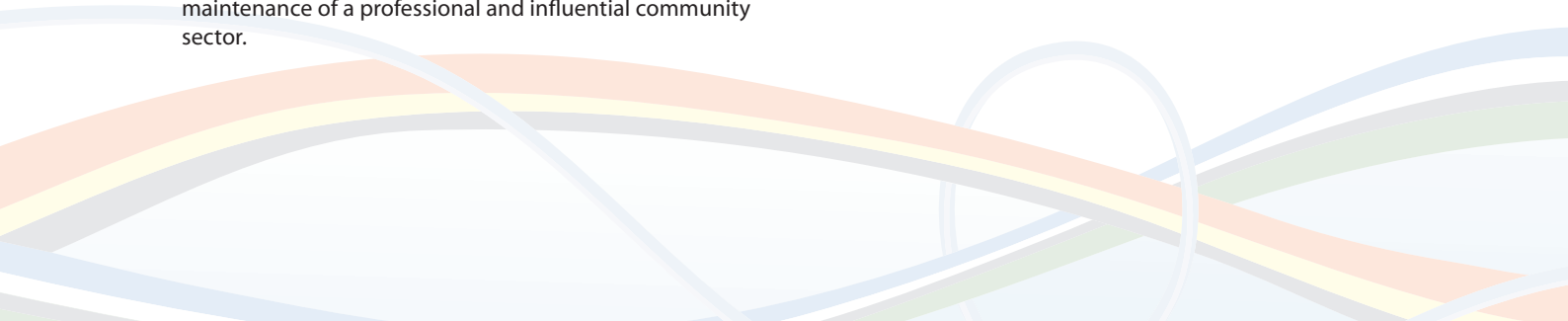
ACTCOSS is the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations in the ACT. Membership is drawn from the community sector, advocacy and self help groups, and committed individuals. ACTCOSS advocates for a fair and equitable community that respects and values diversity. We actively encourage collaborations which promote justice, equity and social inclusion.

To achieve this purpose, ACTCOSS:

- provides a voice for and with people living with disadvantage and inequality;
- makes explicit and pursues a social justice agenda by leading policy research and advocacy; and
- undertakes community sector development for the maintenance of a professional and influential community sector.

Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is a core value listed in the ACTCOSS 2009-2013 Strategic Plan.

We believe reconciliation actions will complement and strengthen the core work of the organisation. We aim to infuse reconciliation practices into our everyday work and activities.



Our long term commitment

Our firm commitment to the reconciliation process is evidenced by a long and active commitment to social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Some examples include:

1980s

- enabled access to alcohol and drug services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1990s

- conference on the importance of Reconciliation.
- amendment to the ACTCOSS Constitution to reflect our commitment. The new clause read:

ACTCOSS advocates for a united Australia which respects this land of ours, values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all.

2000s

- made submissions to government on issues likely to impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and considered the position of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector in policy work.

- drafted a seven point 'Pledge for Reconciliation'. The Pledge read:

ACTCOSS pledges to work and advocate for the elimination of disadvantage, poverty and discrimination faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the ACT. In particular, we will:

- advocate for the elimination of economic, income, health and social inequalities which exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the ACT;
- strive to ensure that the rights and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are considered, respected and addressed in all our activities;
- support and advocate for the development of appropriate community services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people provided by both Indigenous run services and non-Indigenous services;
- consult with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to review and improve mechanisms for Government and community consultations and negotiations on issues affecting Indigenous people;
- promote recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander country, culture and history within the ACT community;

- provide appropriate support to networking and collaboration initiatives among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals in the ACT; and
- support the principles of self-determination, justice and cultural integrity.

ACTCOSS pledges to work towards these goals in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT - and we commit to a process of reconciliation and mutual learning in our relationship with Indigenous Australians.

Currently, ACTCOSS is practicing reconciliation by engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and

stakeholders, implementing the Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Toolkit and organising training for the community sector on cultural heritage and history.

The launch of the ACTCOSS RAP incidentally coincides with a new decade of the 2000s. We look forward to seeing where the next part of the journey will lead us in this new era.



Our RAP

This, our first RAP, aims to affirm our existing reconciliation practices and provide a process for reviewing how we can further contribute to, strengthen and add value to our nation's reconciliation journey.

Our RAP Steering Committee was formed in September 2009 and consists of four General Committee members and three staff members. The development of our RAP was characterised by a period of extensive self reflection for the organisation. Meetings were convened monthly at the ACTCOSS office.

Feedback on our draft was received through consultation with internal and external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. ACTCOSS was fortunate to work alongside a member of the ACT Indigenous Elected Body during the whole process. We also met with representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in the ACT for further consultation. The Steering Committee felt the opportunity to work collaboratively with members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee on the RAP was beneficial in itself.

ACTCOSS also worked closely and consistently with representatives from Reconciliation Australia during the development of the RAP.

Our RAP actions focus on:

1. reinforcing our organisational structures to embed our commitment to the mutual benefits of relationships, respect and opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
2. supporting the Canberra community sector in its engagement in reconciliation through ongoing collaborations with Reconciliation Australia and other stakeholders.

ACTCOSS acknowledges and thanks the General Committee members and all external stakeholders for their contribution to the document. Without their hard work and dedication, this RAP would not have come to fruition. Our RAP will continue to be monitored and aligned with the ACTCOSS Strategic Plan.



Relationships

ACTCOSS values respectful relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians as an important bridge to facilitate a diverse, tolerant and inclusive community. ACTCOSS looks forward to strengthening relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, the Indigenous Elected Body and with Elders across the ACT.

Focus area: Building stronger relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and associations			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
1. Greater support for and involvement with local Aboriginal Elders, the ACT Indigenous Elected Body and Aboriginal organisations.	Deputy Director	August 2010	Establish dialogue with the ACT Indigenous Elected Body to identify opportunities to support their work through mutually beneficial partnerships and projects.
		November 2010	Establish dialogue with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council in the ACT to identify opportunities to support their work through future collaborations.
		December 2010	Attend 5 Annual General Meetings of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations every year as invited.
		July 2011	Listen, learn and identify gaps for future policy and sector development work with 3 or more areas for collaborative action with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations identified for inclusion in our RAP refresh.
		July 2011	All policy work which has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus will incorporate feedback from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Focus area: Lead the Canberra community sector's engagement in reconciliation			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
2. Commit to a Statement of Commitment for Closing the Gap in Aboriginal disadvantage.	Director	November 2010	A 'Closing the Gap' Statement of Commitment will be signed at the ACTCOSS Conference by the Director, the President and one of the Co-Chairs of the Closing the Gap Secretariat.
3. Be an active advocate for Reconciliation by promoting RAPs in the Community Sector.	Director	July 2011	Organise 2 seminars a year with Reconciliation Australia which encourage and support community organisations to develop RAPs.
		February 2011	Develop a model RAP template for the sector in collaboration with Reconciliation Australia.
		July 2011	Bring people together and lead a conversation about collaboratively advocating to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community sector workers in their work on RAP working groups. Seek to address any identified issues.
4. Continue to support Aboriginal Culture, History and Heritage training for the sector.	Deputy Director	July 2011	Deliver 6 Aboriginal Cultural, History and Heritage training sessions a year.
5. Develop links with other local organisations involved in reconciliation.	Deputy Director	July 2011	Contact organisations and groups such as ReconciliACT, ANTaR and the Journey of Healing to identify opportunities for future collaborations.

Respect

Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners, peoples and their diverse cultures is pivotal to strengthening the social fabric of Australian society.

Focus area: Acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
1. Acknowledge Traditional Owners.	Director	July 2011	An Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners is given at every official meeting, seminar and training session.
		July 2011	An Acknowledgment of the Traditional Owners will appear as part of all written publications including policy submissions, website, signature blocks and meeting agendas.
		July 2011	Permanent signage at the ACTCOSS office will acknowledge the Traditional Owners.
		October 2010	Develop a community resource on Acknowledgement of Country and other cultural protocols as part of an induction kit for organisations working in the sector.
		August 2011	A Welcome to Country is provided by a Traditional Owner at two events each year for the duration of this RAP.
Focus area: Celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
2. Create a calendar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates of cultural significance for the community sector.	Sector Development Officer	December 2010	Calendars produced and distributed in hard copy, electronically and on the ACTCOSS website.
3. Celebrate culturally significant dates.	Sector Development Officer	July 2011	All staff members to celebrate one or more significant dates such as National Sorry Day, Mabo Day and NAIDOC week.

4. Greater participation in NAIDOC week celebrations.	Sector Development Officer	July 2011	ACTCOSS will hold at least one event annually during NAIDOC week. All staff will support one community event per year.
5. Display artwork, symbols and flags in the office.	Director	December 2010	Ensure all existing art work have artists, stories and meanings fully acknowledged though deeper learning and use of exploratory information. Ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are place in a prominent position in the office and the meaning of each flag is acknowledged.
Focus area: Actively encourage the cultural awareness journey of the organisation, the General Committee and the staff			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
6. Continue to use the Cultural Awareness Self-Assessment Toolkit to facilitate an on-going cycle of cultural self-reflection.	Deputy Director	July 2011	Staff will continue to discuss one standard of the Toolkit every month, seeking to identify ways to further improve the cultural competency of the staff and organisation.
7. Provide cultural awareness training for all staff and General Committee members.	Deputy Director	July 2011	All staff and General Committee members participate in at least one day of cultural training per year with an external consultant. All new staff and General Committee members are strongly encouraged to read Reconciliation Australia's online cultural awareness tool at www.shareourpride.org.au
8. Rename our Indigenous Supported Accommodation Assistance project.	President, Director and Sector Development Officers	November 2010	Project renamed by our current project workers to reflect its broader practice.

Opportunities

Capacity building opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities are vital for breaking cycles of disadvantage and reinforce a positive narrative of success. We believe the promotion of a sector culture which values skill sharing benefits the entire community and enables ACTCOSS to better lead the social justice agenda.

Focus area: Reinforce in organisational structures the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and General Committee members			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are highly valued members of our team.	Director and President	July 2011	Develop and implement an employment strategy which aims to ensure 20% of ACTCOSS's staff are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander at all times.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented on our General Committee.	Director and President	November 2011	Develop a policy which ensures 1 or more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander designated positions on the ACTCOSS General Committee.
3. Revise all human resources policies and procedures to ensure they are accessible and appealing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members.	President and Deputy Director	July 2011	All human resources policies and procedures reviewed and wording tested by Aboriginal workers at ACTCOSS and in other community sector organisations.
4. Promote pathways which encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to work in the community sector.	Deputy Director	July 2011 July 2012	Develop a model work experience program within ACTCOSS. ACTCOSS will offer at least one student placement a year.
5. Ensure ongoing funding to adequately support the work of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sector Development team.	President and Director	November 2010	Continue meeting consistently with government to maintain the viability of the program.

6. Actively support the professional development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at ACTCOSS.	Deputy Director	July 2011	Develop a practice which identifies and furthers the career aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Provide Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff with an opportunity to meet with an external career development consultant.
Focus area: Sectoral investment in developing the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and organisations			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
7. Actively encourage the community sector to invest in the professional development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.	Membership and Communications Officer Director and Deputy Director	July 2011	Messages advertising professional development courses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers will be articulated in every second newsletter and on the website each month. Present information at relevant forums such as Joint Pathways, Human Resources and Home and Community Care networks on the importance and benefits of offering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff professional development opportunities.
8. Promote Governance training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and organisations in the community sector.	Deputy Director	July 2011	Specifically inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations of the ACTCOSS Governance Series as they are organised.
9. Organise seminars and forums which raise awareness of topical issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community sector workers.	Deputy Director	July 2011	2 seminars a year will be organised.

Tracking progress and reporting

Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
1. The RAP Steering Committee made up of staff and General Committee members continues to meet on a regular basis to lead our RAP journey.	Director and President	October 2010 August 2011	RAP Governance framework developed and reviewed annually. RAP Working Group meets face to face quarterly to monitor the progress of the RAP.
2. Feedback on and input into our RAP is received from external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	RAP Steering Committee	August 2011 August 2011	RAP Reference Group, comprising 3 external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, meets three times a year to discuss our RAP initiatives. Feedback is incorporated into our annual RAP refresh.
3. Whole of organisation ownership of our RAP.	Director and President	August 2011	RAP discussed monthly at staff and General Committee meetings.
4. Progress, achievements and learnings in implementing the RAP are shared on a regular basis.	Deputy Director and RAP Steering Committee	August 2011 November 2011 July 2011	A report on our RAP progress is provided quarterly to our General Committee who respond with feedback. Report on RAP progress included in our Annual Reports. Reports on RAP progress are publicly celebrated through our website and quarterly newsletters.
5. RAP reported on and refreshed annually.	Deputy Director and RAP Steering Committee	July 2011 August 2011	RAP Report available on our and Reconciliation Australia websites. Refreshed RAP available on our and Reconciliation Australia websites.



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