This second edition of ‘Yulendj – making connections’ celebrates the many achievements of Monash Indigenous staff and students over the past 12 months. These achievements and stories demonstrate the strength of the University’s commitment to the success of Indigenous people.

The Indigenous Advisory Council has been providing strategic advice to the University for three years and I am pleased, as Chair, that we now have a strong framework for the Indigenous Strategic Plan, which includes the drafting of a Reconciliation Action Plan. The Indigenous Advisory Council’s many achievements this year are outlined on page 24.

The Monash Indigenous Centre, in the Faculty of Arts, excels in teaching and in cutting-edge research. Under the directorship of Professor Lynette Russell, the Centre is educating students with a strong social justice agenda, and teaches about both the past and contemporary experience of Indigenous Australians. It is very pleasing that Professor Russell’s work has been acknowledged over the past 12 months with a number of honours, which are listed on page 6.

Understanding and sharing Indigenous knowledge and cultures makes Monash an outstanding place to be. The University this year has implemented Cultural Safety Training for all staff. These workshops have been exceptionally well attended and will continue as part of Monash’s professional development training. Find out more about creating a culturally safe place at Monash on page 17.

I am very pleased with the positive stories and experiences at Monash presented in this second edition of ‘Yulendj – making connections’.

Professor Colin Bourke MBE
Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Council
As Monash University’s Elder-in-Residence, Aunty Diane Singh sums up her diverse position simply and succinctly: “My role is to provide a link to people. A link between the University and the community.”

But ask those who work with Aunty Di, or any of the students she has mentored and encouraged, and it’s obvious she fits a lot more into her job description.

For example, Aunty Di plays an instrumental role in the organisation and success of one of the most important days on the University’s annual calendar – Elders’ Day. In 2012, more than 100 Elders from various Aboriginal communities around Victoria came together, culminating in a lunch hosted by the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor.

“We had great attendance this year,” says Aunty Di. “Even better than last year.”

The day is a celebration as well as an opportunity to catch up, network and recognise the contribution of Indigenous Elders to Monash University. This year’s event started with a tour of two art exhibitions: one curated from the University’s permanent collection of Indigenous art, the other a collection of original artwork created by students from the Gippsland campus through the Koorie Footprints to Higher Education program.

Professor Boni Robertson from Griffith University in Queensland was the guest speaker at the morning seminar – ‘The Role of Elders in Higher Education’. Professor Robertson shared her experiences in advising on Indigenous policy, the positive impact of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council of Elders at Griffith University, and her insights into successful community engagement.

The seminar was followed by a lunch in the University Club at which the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Indigenous Advisory Council Chair, Professor Colin Bourke, all spoke. The Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor also presented Professor Bourke, Associate Professor Marlene Drysdale (absent on the day), Professor Uncle Henry Atkinson (absent on the day) and Aunty Diane with academic stoles in the colours of the Aboriginal flag as an acknowledgement of their “dedication and hard work” in making Monash a better place and their role in “advancing Indigenous education”.

In his presentation to Aunty Di, Vice-Chancellor Ed Byrne said: “As Elder-in-Residence, Aunty Diane guides us in our engagement with Indigenous people and communities, contributes to the teaching of Indigenous Studies and provides leadership and advice as a member of the Indigenous Advisory Council. Her contribution to Monash is immeasurable.”

Aunty Di is humble in her acceptance of any individual praise and recognition. She refers at all times to “working as part of a team” and prefers to talk about the work that she loves – helping young Indigenous people find a pathway to higher education, especially at Monash University.
“I spend a lot of time traveling to various schools around Melbourne and Victoria with our Indigenous Student Recruitment Officer, Kristel Keleher. Kristel and I talk to Indigenous students and explain their options.”

“It’s important to be out there meeting kids in years 8 and 9, because by years 11 and 12 it can be too late.”

Aunty Di is supportive of the increasing number of government programs, such as the Wannik Education Strategy, that have the overarching principle to deliver the best possible education to Victoria’s Koorie students and to continually look for ways to increase higher education participation rates.

On campus, Aunty Di is a friendly face and caring mentor to many Indigenous students who seek her out for advice, guidance or simply a cup of tea and a chat. Together with other Elders, Aunty Di is active in helping students in the University’s community explore their identity.

“I encourage secondary school students to find out more about their identity and community – to find out who they are and where they are from,” says Aunty Di. “But sometimes that doesn’t happen until they reach university. Together with other Elders, we will put them in touch with the right people and communities. It’s not a formal role, but it just happens. Identity is important for wellbeing.”

Formal or otherwise, Aunty Di’s role at Monash University is, as the Vice-Chancellor recognises, “simply immeasurable”.

Uncle Pat Farrant and Uncle Doug Smith wearing possum skin cloaks at Elders Day.
Their place is to educate themselves and by extension educate their families and their friends
Professor Lynette Russell, Director of the Monash Indigenous Centre (MIC), has a burning passion for digging up the past – just not literally. The historian and research fellow initially studied as an archaeologist but found it wasn’t for her.

“I’ve always had a great passion for the past. Even as a small kid I was always reading history books. History, archaeology was always very romantic, but once I’d done archaeology I realised I didn’t like field work – I didn’t want to get my fingernails dirty!” she jokes.

“I found I was much more interested in the text. I became much more interested in the 19th-Century ethnographers, the people who observed the Aboriginal people and wrote extensively about them. This has brought me to my current project, called The Victorian Ethnographers, which is very much about 19th-Century ethnographic thought.”

Professor Russell’s Australian Research Council Professorial Fellowship runs until 2016. She has formerly sat on the Collections Council for the federal government and held an advisory role for the Public Record Office Victoria. She is a fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, and sits on the State Library reference committee and the Melbourne Museum’s research committee.

This year she had the rare distinction of becoming a fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Britain, a particularly satisfying honour. “I was delighted, because I’m already a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute. It was a nice acknowledgement that I’m not just ‘from the colonies’, I’m a real historian.”

Closer to home, Professor Russell’s research has culminated in joint publications with Professor Ian McNiven, head of Monash’s School of Geography and Environmental Science’s Program for Australian Indigenous archaeology.

“We have relationships with the communities, so we’ll go down there and he’ll do the archaeology and I’ll do the historical work. We complement each other.”

Professor Russell, a strong advocate for social justice and “a one-eyed Essendon supporter”, has been at Monash for 12 years and believes Aboriginal studies are essential. “We talk about being a reconciled country, but unless every Australian can tell you whose land it is that they live on, who was there before them, it’s just lip service. It’s important we move beyond the symbolic and tokenistic and into something approaching deep understanding.”

At Monash, this begins with the students. The Monash Indigenous Centre offers units that encourage students to understand the past and contemporary experiences of Indigenous Australians. Teaching at the Centre includes lectures, small tutorial and seminar groups that encourage debate and inquiry. Students can take major or minor sequences and elective units at first, second and third year.

“Most (students) have come to us with some sort of social justice agenda,” she says. “Their desire is that they will make life better for Aboriginal people. I invariably tell them that’s not their place; their place is to educate themselves and by extension educate their families and their friends.”

Professor Russell is determined to see the Centre forge ahead with cutting-edge research and, through this, to reach as many people as possible. “I’m keen to use more popular ways to disseminate research, such as documentaries, films, animations – we’ve got the animation centre here. Those are all great ways to get people thinking about the history of the country.”
Even as a little girl, Kendra Keleher was fascinated by the workings of the human body. “I used to ask my mum funny questions all the time, like ‘How did blood get into my body?’ Doing nursing seemed like a natural choice.”

Kendra has just completed a Bachelor of Nursing at the Monash Peninsula campus. In 2013, she heads to St Vincent’s Hospital, where she will complete her graduate year in mental health – an area she has especially enjoyed throughout her degree.

“Mental health is such an interesting area. One in four people in the community experience mental illness at some time in their lives, so it’s pretty important.”

Kendra says she has been able to develop a good rapport with mental health patients during her placements, and this natural affinity is behind her decision to pursue a career in mental health.

“I want to work in the community, perhaps as a case manager visiting people in their homes. I think there’s still a bit of a stigma attached to mental illness, and I’d like to contribute to reducing that somehow.”

Yet, Kendra is still keeping her options open.

“If things don’t work out for me doing mental health nursing, I’ll transition back to general nursing on the emergency ward, which I also really loved during my placements. You get everything from a sore stomach to a sawn-off finger in emergency, so there’s never a dull moment!”

For Kendra, clinical placements were a highlight of her Bachelor of Nursing experience.

“I did a mental health placement at the Albert Road Clinic and also one in emergency at Dandenong Hospital.”

At Dandenong, Kendra participated in the “student-led-bed” program, where she looked after patients directly as part of a small team that included two student nurses and two student doctors.

“Although we were supervised by qualified clinicians, we had to make a lot of decisions ourselves. It was a very realistic learning experience.”

Kendra began her Bachelor of Nursing after entering Monash via the Indigenous Non-Award Pathway program. She describes Monash as “a very supportive environment” in which to study.

“Nursing is a three-year degree, but I’ve done it part-time. Throughout the entire six years I’ve felt very supported by everyone at Monash. Being a smaller campus, Peninsula is very welcoming. The Indigenous student lounge is great – the beanbags, hot drinks and computers are very handy and the tutoring support made a big difference in helping me get my assignments over the line.”

As well as completing her degree, Kendra has pursued other opportunities, including an internship at KPMG, where she has worked in health advisory, evaluating government health policies.

“The KPMG internship has been an intense but terrific experience. I might think about going into it full-time after I’ve had a few years on the ground as a nurse.”

For Kendra, it’s an odd sensation to have finished studying after so many years; however, she says more study lies ahead for her in the future.

“In nursing, you need to keep studying to keep up with the latest research into best-practice health care. I don’t mind because I know it will help me keep my knowledge and skills up to date. It’s not a chore if you enjoy what you’re learning about.”
We had to make a lot of decisions ourselves. It was a very realistic learning experience.
As a senior school student at St Patrick’s College, Ballarat, Carl Smith knew he wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people. In year 12, Carl volunteered to become a tutor, leaving school at 2pm every Monday and taking the bus to the Edmund Rice Centre in St Albans on the outskirts of Melbourne to help school-aged refugees and other new arrivals to Australia with their education.

“I loved it,” says 18-year-old Carl. “So many of these kids were really switched on and making the most of this opportunity.”

It was a turning point for Carl, who until halfway through year 12 had been considering studying law at university. Inspired by some “fantastic teachers” at St Patrick’s College and motivated by his experience at the Edmund Rice Centre, Carl changed his preference to teaching and received an ATAR score that allowed him to select almost any university.

“It was after I got my results that I received a text message from Monash and was invited to consider their Bachelor program as an Indigenous applicant. I came down and met with Kristel Keleher, Monash’s dedicated Indigenous Student Recruitment Officer, who was incredibly welcoming and helped me with my change of preference and scholarship applications. I knew I wanted to be a part of Monash.”

A few weeks later, Carl was thrilled to find out he had been awarded a total of five scholarships, including the Monash Indigenous Scholarship for Achievement and Equity.

In 2012, Carl completed his first year in a double degree program that will see him graduate with both a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education (Secondary). Thanks to his scholarship, he has been able to live across from the Clayton campus at Mannix College.

“Receiving the scholarship has allowed me to move to Melbourne instead of commuting five hours a day,” says Carl. “It has helped make my adjustment so much easier and given me the much-needed time to focus on my studies.”

Originally from country South Australia, Carl has been back to visit his Indigenous relatives of the Kalkadoon community in northwest Queensland, where his grandad took him out to learn about country and his heritage.

“Exploring my Indigenous identity is important to me and I am looking forward to studying Indigenous electives during my degree.”
Masters of Teaching student Lucy Amon has taken a circuitous route towards her chosen profession, completing a Bachelor of Physiotherapy before deciding that a career in education was her true calling.

“I knew about halfway through my physio degree that it just wasn’t for me, but I decided to complete the qualification before changing tack,” says Lucy. “Physio taught me a lot. As well as the course content, I developed life and work skills that have proven invaluable during my Masters of Teaching school placements.”

Although she had studied hard at school to gain a place in Monash’s Bachelor of Physiotherapy course, Lucy says teaching was always in the back of her mind.

“My mum and my aunty are both in education so I’ve been able to see first-hand what working in the profession is like. Also, I’ve always wanted to work with young people.”

Once she’s completed her Masters of Teaching in mid-2013, Lucy will be qualified to teach year 11 and 12 biology, as well as health from years 7–12.

The new Masters of Teaching replaces the former Diploma of Education. It is completed over three extended (i.e., 17-week) semesters and includes 10 weeks of school placements.

“My first placement was at Nossal High School. As a selective-entry school, the students are very bright and motivated. There’s a strong focus on learning and preparation for tertiary study. I loved my experience there and I learnt so much from my supervisor as well as the other teachers.”

As well as Lucy’s obvious passion for teaching and learning, she is an outstanding student herself, having achieved distinctions and high distinctions in all her Masters of Teaching subjects to date. While diligent and hard-working, she says a key factor underpinning her success has been receiving the Colin and Eleanor Bourke Scholarship.

“The Scholarship has been fantastic because it has allowed me to focus fully on my studies instead of trying to squeeze study in on top of a part-time job.”

Lucy has just one semester of her Masters of Teaching to complete before she is a fully qualified teacher.

“I have two in-depth units to complete in Semester One, 2013. One is on ‘building creative pedagogies’ and the other is on ‘Indigenous issues in education’. I’m really excited about the Indigenous unit because this is an area I’d love to work in once I’ve finished my degree.”

Lucy says she hopes to work with Indigenous students in inner or bayside Melbourne.
Storm Henry exudes enthusiasm and dedication – she is a young person eager to study hard and use her education to develop a meaningful career. Storm is one of five 2012 recipients of the Monash Indigenous Scholarship for Achievement and Equity. She has just completed her first year of a double degree – Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science – and says the funds have helped enormously, allowing her to devote more time to study and purchase extra items for her studies such as a lab coat and textbooks.

“It has also covered some of the costs and additional living expenses associated with relocating to Melbourne,” says Storm.

Storm’s journey to Monash started after year 12 when she decided to take a gap year to work and save money for her tertiary studies. Having enjoyed Japanese at school, Storm was keen to continue with her language studies at university and heard that Monash had a great Japanese program. She applied for a scholarship at Monash and was delighted to be successful in gaining both entry to the course of her choice and the Achievement scholarship. Storm deferred and began working at the Gunditjmara Co-op medical clinic in Warrnambool near where she lived in Port Fairy, in south-west Victoria.

“I was surprised at how much I loved it,” she says. “It was great to get work experience in an Indigenous community.”

“I saw first-hand the great relationships forged by the nurses with the Indigenous people. I also completed my Certificate III in Medical Business Administration and began to think seriously about a career in health.”

As a result, Storm changed her preferences and is now on a pathway to a degree in the health sciences. She has applied for nursing and midwifery and will find out if she has been successful at the end of the year.

“I almost gave up my education after year 11. Now I am on my way to a career I know I will love. I hope I can be a role model for my sisters who are also looking at coming to Monash University.”
Applying for university and navigating the enrolment process can be an intimidating prospect for new students. Thousands of students at Monash University have had that process made easier thanks to Cathy Arena, who has worked in admissions and student services roles for the University for 14 years.

“It’s a big responsibility,” says Cathy, who feels personally connected to each and every student she encounters. “Especially at selection time. It’s a careful, objective process which can sometimes be quite stressful.”

Cathy, 35, began as a receptionist on a one-year contract at the Monash Medical Centre. From there she moved to student services in the Law Faculty, where she worked directly with both prospective and current students, handling their queries about courses, timetables, how to access University services and their day-to-day progress – a natural fit for her friendly, approachable personality.

“I found I really enjoyed working with the students. I also loved my faculty manager, who made coming to work enjoyable.”

It was during her first year at Monash that Cathy first encountered the Monash Indigenous Centre (formerly Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies – CAIS) and she would drop in every lunchtime to catch up with other staff and students.

“It’s such a friendly, welcoming place. I have made a lot of friends at the Centre.”

While working at Monash, Cathy has also obtained her Diploma in Business Administration, which helped support her progress through several roles, including 12 years in the Education Faculty at Monash’s Peninsula campus.

“I met so many great students in Education,” says Cathy. “It’s a major faculty at the Peninsula campus covering primary, secondary and early childhood teaching degrees.”

From the Peninsula campus, Cathy moved back to Clayton two years ago to take up a student services role, again in Education. But in March Cathy took on her biggest role to date – as a senior admissions consultant in the General Admissions centre – the hub of student services.

“We are a team of five and a major part of my role is to train other admissions staff across all the faculties. I have very little contract with students anymore, which I miss sometimes. But I also enjoy working with other staff, helping them to become the best they can be.”

Cathy’s birth family is Irukandji – from the area between Cairns and Port Douglas. She was adopted by a Dutch family who lived in Melbourne and in the past few years has been back to Queensland on several occasions to get to know her Irukandji family, who were delighted to welcome her “home”.

“Between my adoptive and birth families I have so many brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles – it’s sometimes hard to keep up!”

Enrolling the best
In one of the most exciting archaeological discoveries this century, a joint project between Monash University, a consortium of French, New Zealand and other Australian research institutions and the Jawoyn Association of Arnhem Land has revealed Aboriginal rock art carbon-dated back to 28,000 years ago.

This extraordinary discovery is just the start of one of the most significant Indigenous archaeological projects in Australian history – pushing back the known age of Australian Aboriginal rock paintings by more than 10,000 years and contemporaneous with some of the famous cave paintings of Western Europe. And it came about almost by accident.

Eminent Monash University archaeologist Dr Bruno David – who leads the excavation team in Jawoyn Country – has devoted his entire professional career to living and working with Australian Indigenous communities. It started when he was a student in Queensland and he sees it as a lifelong commitment. Dr David has little doubt that it is only through respect of Indigenous attachments and rights to ancestral places – an attachment at the heart of the Aboriginal notion of ‘Country’ – that he became a candidate for the Jawoyn project.

“I received an email from the Jawoyn Association in 2008 with an invitation to help Jawoyn Elders explore some of their culture and Country,” says Dr David. “But I was unable to start then due to prior commitments.”

“Later in 2010, the opportunity came for us to start working together. We began by assembling an international team of specialists with which to undertake the archaeologically and culturally sensitive work of excavating important sites. As we got to know each other, we then decided to put together a Memorandum of Understanding to formalise long-term research between the Monash team, the Jawoyn Association, and the international team members we had assembled.”

The first site Dr David and the team worked on is situated in a remote part of Arnhem Land, accessible only by helicopter, about one hour’s flight north-east of Katherine in the Northern Territory.

During a routine aerial inspection in 2006, members of the Jawoyn Association noticed an unusually large rock shelter and landed the helicopter for further inspection. What they discovered was a cave that had been carved open through thousands of years of stone quarrying by ancestors who had also decorated the ceiling and walls with hundreds of wonderfully preserved rock paintings.

After the rediscovery of the cave, Jawoyn Elders who had visited the site as children revealed the site’s name as Nawarla (‘place of’) Gabarnmang (‘hole in the rock’), and told of its significance as a camping point en-route to ceremony in Jawoyn Country.

Elders Margaret Katherine talks with the archeologists
These Elders identified the Jawoyn clan Buyhmi as the traditional owners of the site. It was Buyhmi Elder Margaret Katherine who first welcomed Dr David with the request for his help and introduced him to Country.

Fast forward four years and everyone involved with the project has been amazed and humbled by the discoveries they have, literally, unearthed.

In putting a team together, Dr David turned to the best for help – world-leading French rock art archaeologists, geomorphologists and geochemists with whom Dr David had previously worked in similar community-based research of ancestral homelands in Papua New Guinea.

These international researchers include Professors Jean-Michel Geneste of the French National Centre for Prehistory and Jean-Jacques Delannoy of the University of Savoie, key members of the famous Lascaux and Chauvet Caves research teams in France. The new Jawoyn project now sees their integral participation through the support of the French Ministry of Culture. Teaming up are long-term colleagues Professor Bryce Barker and Dr Lara Lamb from the University of Southern Queensland, Professor Bert Roberts and Dr Zenobia Jacobs, who have worked out the ages of some of the most important archaeological sites across the globe – including the remarkable ‘Hobbit’ finds of Flores in Southeast Asia – and Dr Fiona Petchey of the Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory at the University of Waikato in New Zealand.

“Because of our previous collaborations, finding the right people to work on the project was simple,” says Dr David. “Putting together a successful team is not just about technical expertise. It is also about being sensitive to, and understanding of, Jawoyn culture and Country. This is a collaborative project, but at the end of the day, the places and meanings of our discoveries belong to the Jawoyn people. Most important in any such research is to ensure everyone in the team shows deep respect. There is also the additional benefit to the research itself that respect inspires, a fundamental ingredient to what we do professionally if we want to do it well, so one good thing leads to another.”

The Australian and French archaeological team of six began excavating, recording and dating significant archaeological discoveries as soon as they were on site. And the revelations have not stopped since. Since that first year, Dr David has expanded the team to involve specialists from a network of other Australian and New Zealand universities. The process of uncovering the buried rock art and other archaeological findings is a meticulous process. One millimetre of sediment measures about 50 years in the historical profile of the soil. Some of the most notable discoveries across the four Jawoyn sites excavated so far have been:

- A broken fragment of a 35,000 year-old ground-edged stone axe unearthed beneath a spectacular frieze of paintings, the earliest known ground axe in the world
- Evidence of Aboriginal occupation dating to more than 47,000 years ago (exactly how much more is the topic of ongoing investigations), the earliest confirmed carbon-dated Aboriginal site in Australia
- Rock painting dating back 28,000 years, the oldest known painting in Australia
- Superbly preserved rock art depicting extinct animals that predate “x-ray” imagery, as well as so-called ‘dynamic’ figures showing people with boomerangs and spears – boomerangs have not been used for hunting for thousands of years in Arnhem Land cultures.
Given the known antiquity of ochre crayons in northern Australia, and the now-confirmed great age of the densely decorated site of Nawarla Gabarnmang in Jawoyn Country, Dr David believes it is only a matter of time before rock art is discovered that can be carbon dated back to almost 50,000 years – a time older than the earliest modern humans in Europe.

To the Jawoyn people, these discoveries bring with them social impacts of fundamental cultural importance. Ray Whear, the Jawoyn Association’s Cultural and Environment Manager said the Jawoyn people knew there was “a whole lot of stuff to find out there that was culturally significant and of great age, but we needed Bruno to give it archaeological credibility."

“These discoveries are giving Jawoyn people renewed pride in their history. It has been incredibly important to have it all confirmed by international experts. We always knew the ancestral Jawoyn sites had artifacts from very ancient times.”

Until the start of this project to record and investigate ancestral sites, a large percentage of the Jawoyn youth had not seen rock art. Spreading the news of the Nawarla Gabarnmang discovery to the Jawoyn people has had its own logistical challenges. The community is spread out across 56,000 square kilometres, so updates travel via a combination of direct communication with community members who visit the digs each year, by word of mouth, through meetings organized by the Jawoyn Association and through the Association’s noticeboard in Katherine. Dr David is continuously reporting work in progress and findings to the Jawoyn Association as these become available, with telephone and email communication taking place at least twice a week year-round. Elders and representatives of the Jawoyn Association Board visit Monash each year.

The Association has plans to share these unique aspects of their culture with the wider Australian and international public by way of cultural eco-tourism.

It will take some planning to ensure the cultural integrity of sites is maintained while information on chosen aspects of Jawoyn culture and history are shared, especially with access limited to expensive helicopter travel. Jawoyn Elder Margaret Katherine hopes that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians will soon be able to make the journey to Nawarla Gabarnmang to experience and connect with this important ancestral place.

Dr David talks animatedly about the huge amount of delicate and sensitive archaeological work still to be done excavating at Nawarla Gabarnmang and other nearby sites. In fact, for him it will be a lifelong project. The work also brings international recognition to the great work performed by Dr David and the international archaeological team who work with the Jawoyn Association, but Dr David is quick to put it in perspective.

“This is a deeply personal project as well as a professional highlight,” says Dr David. “Trust is fundamental to the success of this project for all parties. The university-based researchers work sensitively together with the Jawoyn people every step of the way.”

“And it is a privilege to do so.”

Historic Aboriginal rock art at Nawarla Gabarnmang
Monash University’s Cultural Safety Workshops program is another exciting advancement in Indigenous education developed in 2012 by the Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit.

Open to all staff, the program supports the University’s ongoing commitment to ensuring all six campuses provide a culturally safe and welcoming environment for Indigenous students, staff and visitors.

Developed by Inala Cooper, Brian Walker, Aunty Diane Singh – who all present during the training – and Professor Marlene Drysdale, the team sat down early in 2012 to brainstorm the content for a half-day workshop. Once a framework was developed, they piloted the concept with a “test” audience and were delighted at the response.

“We had some amazing feedback,” says Brian. “But it is quite a draining task for each of the presenters, talking personally about their experiences and views.

“We decided it would be even better if we engaged the services of a facilitator. That’s when we contacted Rueben Berg – an Indigenous architect and consultant.”

Demand has been so high for the sessions, Rueben, together with the Monash presenters from the Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit, has facilitated more than 10 sessions in the last two months of 2012. With an average of 14 attendees at each session, the program aims to educate staff and students by challenging their assumptions and perceptions.

“It’s not about making people feel guilty, or laying any blame,” says Rueben. “It’s about education, highlighting the full history of Indigenous Australia and its diversity. Yes, there have been many tragic examples in the last 200 years of colonisation, but there are many success stories too.”

Before attending the sessions, participants are asked to undertake some pre-reading put together by the team. It provides a factual overview of Australia’s history and the many factors that affect Indigenous people.

It starts with Aboriginal life pre-1788 (English settlement), when there were 750 clans in nearly 300 tribes, and works through to Kevin Rudd’s apology in 2008 to all Indigenous Australians.

“The training provides participants with hands-on activities to illustrate both what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have gone through, and are still going through,” says Rueben. “It also highlights the rich diversity of Aboriginal cultures across Australia, such as language, ceremonies and law.”

Cultural safety
on campus

Reuben Berg
Monash University’s Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) Program Manager Kyle Vander Kuyp, a former Olympic hurdler, knows a thing or two about making great strides, and this also describes the progress of the University’s AIME program.

In 2012, more than 1300 Monash University students expressed interest in becoming mentors for Indigenous year 9 to 12 students, with 110 eventually following through with formal applications – double the number received in 2011.

“A lot of them say they want to find out more about Indigenous Australia and work in that area,” says Kyle, who leaves at the end of the year to take up a mentoring role with AFL SportsReady and work with school-based and full-time Indigenous trainees.

AIME is a national program run in collaboration with tertiary institutions, and involves undergraduate university students mentoring secondary school students both on and off campus. It seeks to lift secondary school retention rates and lay the path to university for Indigenous students.

“We put it to the mentors that 15 hours of their time spent with a young person could really help put that person on track,” says Kyle. “They can be that person who believes in them and gives them that encouragement. Four years later the mentees might say, ‘You had that conversation with me in that session’, or ‘No-one’s ever said that’ – that’s the potential.”

And it’s not only the mentees who benefit, Kyle adds; it’s a learning experience for all parties. “In that first session the mentors discover the diversity of Indigenous Australia; that some Aboriginal kids have blond hair, blue eyes; and the mentees are wondering what sort of student they’re going to get who they’re supposed to connect with. There’s this ‘two worlds collide’ and then they meet and the layers come off.

“Many of the mentors say they look forward to their AIME sessions – it’s a change from their university grind, where they can turn off their uni head and sit down with a young person.”

New to AIME’s Monash program this year was the formation of five tutor squads that headed off-campus to schools including Melbourne Grammar, Hallam Secondary College (two of eight schools to join the AIME program in 2012), Patterson River Secondary College, Dandenong High and Hampton Park Secondary College.

“It’s a way to offer the support all the way through,” says Kyle. “It’ll only get stronger, as the schools find the best time slot and the kids get the concept that someone’s turned up to support them. The mentors have been fantastic this year in being committed, patient, and they formed their own tutor squad leaders and coordinated themselves.”

Another successful development was the May launch of the AIME Learning Centre at Melbourne boys’ school Scotch College, one of the largest nationwide, where 22 mentors worked with 24 students from various schools in weekly sessions.

Another first this year involved 17 year 11 and 12 students spending three full days on campus at Monash, where part of the course involved compiling an “electronic passport”, an online profile that can be accessed by partner universities and organisations. “It’s a way of seeing potential talent not only for universities but for employers,” says Kyle.

The year 9 and 10 program, which saw 27 students undertake 15 one-hour workshops one-on-one with their mentors, will next year focus on more intensive engagement by becoming a four-day outreach program at Monash University’s Clayton, Peninsula and hopefully Gippsland campuses.

Kyle cannot speak highly enough of the mentors’ dedication in light of their own challenges. “The diversity of mentors is the thing that’s blown me away the past couple of years. It’s not the one type of student putting their hand up.”

Left to right: Ella Colley, Addie Walsh, Jerome Cubillo, Kyle Vander Kuyp
Helping young Indigenous people to achieve their goals through higher education is something Monash University’s Indigenous Student Recruitment Officer Kristel Keleher feels passionate about. Fortunately, it is also her job.

Kristel, together with Indigenous Academic Support Coordinator Jason Brailey and other members of the Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit (Yulendj) including Elder in Residence Aunty Diane Singh, support Indigenous success through a range of secondary school outreach programs, on-campus study assistance and post-graduate career guidance.

“We aim to leave no stone unturned,” Kristel explains. “Our role starts out in the community, interacting with as many students as possible in years seven to 12, providing them with information about the many options available to Indigenous students at Monash University.”

“By explaining the various entry pathways, different scholarships and bursaries that the University makes available to them, students are able to make informed decisions.”

“On top of that, the University, particularly the team at Yulendj, aim to set Indigenous students up for success. Jason Brailey’s role is to assist Indigenous students at Monash by providing one-on-one support. He coordinates the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) which is a Commonwealth funded program where Indigenous students receive one-on-one tutorial sessions for two hours per subject per week.”

“Jason helps students navigate the online timetabling program, assists with scholarships and bursaries, applying to graduate and other requests from students.”

Kristel, Jason and others at Yulendj are clearly making a hugely positive impact on both prospective and current Indigenous students. According to figures published by DIIRSTE, Monash has one of the highest Indigenous student retention rates in Australia. The annual camp, held over three days in December, is all about giving Indigenous secondary school students (years 9 – 12) a taste of life as a Monash University student.

The camp aims to help students develop leadership and teamwork skills to take back to their schools, families and communities. During the course of the three days, students stay on campus at Halls of Residence, experience a number of lectures, take part in group discussions and activities, and tour some of the University faculty buildings and facilities.

“It’s a packed three days. The students really get a compact “snapshot” of life on campus as a student,” Kristel says. “They are also encouraged to explore their thoughts and aspirations around education and a career. Many of our Yulendj and faculty staff are on hand to encourage, facilitate and guide the camp participants.”

Through events like the Hands on Monash Indigenous Summer Camp, Kristel and her colleagues play a vital role in attracting and recruiting Indigenous talent to Monash University – and enrolment numbers reflect the success of their work. Monash has seen an 68% increase in the number of Indigenous undergraduate student enrolments in the last four years (from 65 in 2008 to 109 in 2012). But at the end of the day, it’s simply about opening the minds of young Indigenous people to the prospect of higher education and the opportunities it can present.

“There’s nothing more rewarding than seeing the current students on campus, happy and committed to their studies, knowing that we’ve played a small part in helping set them on an exciting life path that they may not otherwise have followed.”
Past and current students often say that one of the most enriching experiences of university life is living on campus. The clear benefits of being part of a close student community, sharing study time and relaxing together informally all add to a sense of belonging, and contribute to a safe, welcoming and educational environment.

In 2012, two new Halls of Residence opened at Monash University, which added on-campus accommodation for 600 students. There is now live-in accommodation for 1800 students at Monash’s Clayton campus.

Not only were these two new buildings significant for their exceptional facilities and sustainable architecture, but also because of their connection to Indigenous Australia.

Briggs and Jackomos Halls are named in honour of two Indigenous women. Briggs Hall honours Geraldine Briggs, AO, whose lifetime of involvement in Aboriginal community affairs included extensive work to improve Indigenous living conditions. Jackomos Hall honours Merle Jackomos, OAM, whose significant contribution to Indigenous affairs included co-founding the National Aboriginal and Islander Women’s Council.

Cassianne Martin, Deputy Director of Monash Residential Services (MRS), says both Halls were full in 2012 – their first year of being open to students – and are looking to be well oversubscribed for 2013.

“It sometimes takes a while for a new property to gather momentum, but word of mouth has been strong for the two new Halls,” says Cassianne.

“When the students share their positive experiences and stories, it carries more weight than any means of advertising.

“We have had a huge increase of applications for Jackomos and Briggs in 2013 than we did last year, including several Indigenous students. It’s a great result, and not surprising given their excellent facilities.”

The new Halls also meet high standards of environmental sustainability with a five-star “Green Star” rating for design and build, says Cassianne.

“Each building incorporates solar arrays on the roof, grey water recycling and passive heating and cooling. The gardens in the courtyard are a mixture of Indigenous plants and ‘edible gardens’ including fruit and nut trees, raised herb gardens, and the north walls of the buildings are both designed as ‘green walls’ – which in time will be covered by native creepers."

Cassianne says commissioned artwork, completed this year, reflects the Halls’ strong Indigenous connection.
“As a means of connecting the current residents of the Halls with the women after whom their Halls were named, the Briggs and Jackomos families agreed to allow the residents to adopt the Dreaming Totems of Aunty Merle and Aunty Gerry to be used as the Hall mascots.

“To allow the residents to relate to their mascots, we also asked both families if they would support the commissioning of artworks which told the Dreaming stories of the Bigurumduja (the Emu) for Aunty Gerry, and the Watjerra (the Long Neck Turtle) for Aunty Merle. We were also very fortunate that Aunty Gerry’s daughter, Aunty Zeta Thomson, an accomplished artist, agreed to create the works for us using her story of the Bigurumduja, and using the story of the Watjerra provided by the Jackomos family.

“These artworks now hang proudly in the main common room of each Hall, and will be accompanied by additional information about the works, the Dreaming stories and their connection to the Halls.”

MRS offers up to five Indigenous Leadership Pathway Scholarships to Indigenous Australians who are enrolling full-time in an undergraduate or postgraduate degree and intending to live at any of the Halls of Residence. The scholarship is awarded to students who show leadership qualities and provide evidence of significant Indigenous community involvement, and who have the capacity and willingness to act as an ambassador on behalf of Indigenous Australians at MRS events and activities throughout the year.
Each January, while the world’s eyes are focused on the centre court at the Australian Open, a group of 20 talented young Indigenous Australians are enjoying a once-in-a-lifetime tennis coaching experience at Monash University.

The Goolagong National Development Camp (GNDC) is now in its eighth year and is just one of the many initiatives undertaken by the Evonne Goolagong Foundation. As most Australians know, Evonne was one of the world’s leading players throughout the 1970s and early ‘80s, when she won 14 grand slam titles and was the world’s top-ranked women’s player. Ever since, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, AO, MBE, has provided inspiration to Australian Indigenous sports people across the country and dedicated her life to nurturing Indigenous sporting talent.

The GNDC is held at Monash University’s Clayton campus. During the week-long camp, Evonne, her husband Roger Cawley and the squad of 20 young players, aged between 10 and 21, live on campus at the Halls of Residence and train at Monash Sport’s tennis courts.

Leading up to the camp, Evonne and her husband spend 11 months traversing Australia conducting “Come and Try” tennis days, which then feed the Goolagong State Development Camps. It is from the 1100 participants at these camps that the final 20 are invited to the GNDC at Monash.

“Our coaches are looking for boys and girls who display enthusiasm, determination and a willingness to improve themselves given half a chance. Athletic ability is also taken into consideration but is not the determinant factor,” says Evonne. “After consultation with parents and teachers, the final group is selected for the GNDC, where we also have repeat attendees.”

Director of Monash Sport Martin Doulton says the success of the camp is due to a team effort of all the agencies working together for the benefit of the camp participants. Comfortable “away from home” housing provided by Monash Residential Services, a mentoring session with Kyle Vander Kuyp and the AIME team, as well as the guidance, chaperoning and coaching from a number of former camp participants, under the watchful eye of National Indigenous Coach Ian Goolagong, are all part of the experience.

“It’s all about making sure the camp participants feel welcome in a safe and secure environment,” says Martin. “We have hosted the camp for a few years now and developed very positive relationships with Evonne and Roger and everyone involved with the camp. We feel like we are now getting to know what the participants want, and that extends to the right kind of support off-court, as well as being able to provide quality sporting facilities.”

During the week-long camp, participants learn from Evonne and build their athletic and leadership skills. Organisers are also able to identify individuals with the potential to compete at a professional level.

Evonne’s work with young Indigenous tennis players inspires and raises aspirations of these young people, who are learning from a champion; someone who has been in their shoes before.
Organised trips to the Kooyong Classic and Australian Open are also part of their camp activities. Students are able to meet professional players and receive encouragement, guidance and helpful tips.

“It provides them with exposure to what competitive tennis, or any sport, looks like at a top level,” says Martin.

But it’s not all about serves, forehands and backhands. Professional coaches and counsellors spend time with the participants developing life skills – assisting them to work effectively with their communities and encouraging them to stay at school and succeed. Since coming to Monash the theme of the camp has also evolved to incorporate life balance and Indigenous awareness with ‘positive Indigenous identity.

Having the camp continuing at the Monash Clayton campus is also an excellent opportunity to expose young Indigenous tennis players to Monash University and to possibly open the doors to tertiary education. The camp showcases important elements of Monash University’s campus life, which hopefully encourages and instils career-long confidence in all participants.

These links have been greatly enhanced as Evonne has developed an appreciation of University life and in turn exposed Indigenous young people to the opportunities available through tertiary education, including at Monash.

“Many of the young people who attend the camp are from remote communities and by coming to Monash, they are able to see that it is not a big, scary place,” says Martin. “It helps them to connect with others who are pursuing tertiary studies and provides them with knowledge and options about their own future.”

Sport plays an important role in providing fantastic role models, such as Evonne Goolagong Cawley, who show that through hard work anyone can realise their full potential. Monash University is delighted to co-sponsor the camp and welcomes new groups of up-and-coming tennis stars. The University’s commitment to advancing Indigenous Australians is cemented in the Council’s resolution following the National Apology in 2008, the work of the Indigenous Advisory Council, and the drafting of a Reconciliation Action Plan for the University.

Evonne Goolagong Cawley’s work and that of her Foundation through the camps also helps create stronger and lasting links between Monash and Indigenous peoples throughout Australia.

The success of the camps can be measured in many ways – it’s certainly not just about the tennis.

“We have placed 31 youngsters on scholarships at schools around Australia, with four having graduated now at university, two of them in pre-med,” says Evonne, who, with her coaches and administrators, is part of an inspiring team of Indigenous role models. “Starting in February 2013, we will have five more added to the scholarship roll, plus three more camp graduates going to university, two of whom will study law.”

And guidance from the Evonne Goolagong Foundation team continues well beyond the week-long camp.

“We follow through on a daily basis with a mentoring program between family and child, school and child, and employer and youngster, wherever necessary.”

It’s all about making sure the camp participants feel welcome in a safe and secure environment.
Since 2010, the Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC), chaired by Professor Colin Bourke and deputy-chaired by Professor Lynette Russell, has been working to develop and implement strategies in line with the University’s ongoing commitment to progress the awareness and respect of Indigenous affairs across the workforce, student body and extended community.

The University has a long history of supporting Aboriginal and Islander programs, and the forming of the Council three years ago has only strengthened and formalised its approach. The IAC’s central goal is to reflect the views of the local Indigenous communities and advise Monash in relation to programs.

Professor Bourke says although making changes “doesn’t happen overnight”, the IAC, which reports directly to Vice-Chancellor Ed Byrne, contributed to several key achievements in 2012.

“The number of Indigenous employees and students at Monash both increased this year,” says Professor Bourke. “So did the success rates of the Indigenous students already enrolled.

“If Aboriginal and Islander people make up 2.5% of the Australian and 0.7% of the Victorian population, then we want to see the same figures reflected in our staff numbers and student enrolments. We want to see parity in the proportion of Indigenous staff and students at Monash. It’s about equality.

“Monash University aims to be a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Islander people. They have a right to be here and no one should be challenged based on race or gender. From an Indigenous perspective, this is being supported by the Cultural Safety Workshops, which have been a great success this year.

“Elders’ Day was also another success, with about 200 Elders from local and Victorian Indigenous communities enjoying a presentation about the role of Elders in higher education given by Professor Boni Roberston of Griffith University, followed by lunch.”

Small steps bring big gains

The number of Indigenous employees and students at Monash both increased this year.
In 2012, a working party within the IAC has been focused on developing the University’s Reconciliation Action Plan. Professor Bourke says the Plan, which has now been drafted and distributed to the IAC and Monash senior management for comment, outlines actions that will promote the reconciliation of the University community with Indigenous Australia.

“It is about ensuring people recognise and appreciate Indigenous culture and the contribution Indigenous people have made to Australia – both historically and now. After all, the University stands on Aboriginal land.”

Professor Bourke, whose involvement with Monash University dates back to 1975, says the IAC receives strong support from Monash’s Board of Governors, senior management and from the student and staff community, but there are always competing demands for attention and funding within such a large organisation.

“There are 50,000 staff and students across eight campuses, so we don’t expect results overnight,” says Professor Bourke. “It’s about making small, incremental steps towards our overall goal.”

Professor Bourke says the IAC is looking towards another productive year in 2013, including the implementation of the Strategic Plan (of which the Reconciliation Action Plan is a part). Topics to be covered in the Council’s three forums next year include identity, human rights and Indigenous education, and working with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
High achiever pursues an academic career

Every cloud has a silver lining, and for Tom Taylor, missing out on a place studying pharmacy at the end of year 12 turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

“I began a Bachelor of Pharmaceutical Studies degree at Monash University instead, and found that I was actually more suited to this field. It’s based more on science rather than the clinical aspect. I enjoyed the course so much that I went on to do an Honours thesis and am now working on a PhD in Pharmaceutical Studies.”

A bright and capable student, Tom’s academic ability has been obvious since his days as a primary school student in Warrnambool, where he grew up with his parents and two younger sisters. As well as providing him with a strong academic education, Tom says his years at Warrnambool West Primary were vital in terms of putting him in touch with his local tribe.

“The local Aboriginal cooperative were involved at the school and would take us aside to teach us the culture of our tribe, Gunditjmara. In addition we participated in an after-school program where students within our age group were welcomed into the local cooperative to complete homework and assignments with other Indigenous children, irrespective of the school we were attending.”

At high school, Tom was the recipient of Brauer College’s Scholarship for Indigenous Achievement on multiple occasions.

“I remember feeling very proud each time I received this award – standing up in front of the entire school community as an Indigenous student felt significant.”

During his undergraduate degree, Tom received the Monash Indigenous Scholarship for Achievement, which he says helped him to focus on his studies and achieve excellent grades.

“I would have had to find a part-time job without the scholarship, and try to juggle work and study commitments. It was really great to not have this additional stress,” he says.

In 2010, Tom began his Honours year in the Pharmaceutics department of the Monash Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Parkville. He continued his track record of strong academic achievement, ranking second out of his class of 32 students at the end of the year.

“As a result of this performance I was awarded the Monash Indigenous Research Award to complete my PhD research project, entitled ‘Structural effect on acid-base behaviour of drugs’.”

Tom says one of the reasons he has enjoyed learning at Monash University so much is because the University provides Indigenous students with a high level of support. He is a member of Monash’s Indigenous Advisory Council (IAC), an advisory body that makes recommendations directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

“I’m one of two student representatives on the IAC. The committee works to improve the Indigenous experience across the University, focusing particularly on areas such as access, participation and success in education, research and employment.

“Other members of the IAC include academics, faculty heads, HR staff and university policy makers. I value the opportunity to provide an Indigenous perspective and it’s exciting to be able to contribute to the future of Monash in this way.”

Tom anticipates completing his PhD in 2014, after which he hopes to pursue a career in academia.

“I enjoy the academic world and I’d like to move into the education side so I can continue researching and learning within a field I love. My passion is physical chemistry, and Pharmaceutical Sciences allows me to apply that passion in order to help people, which is very rewarding.”
Further information

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