



REFLECT RECONCILIATION

ACTION PLAN

JULY 2022 - JULY 2023



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

REFLECT



**EMPOWERED
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Empowered Community Services

With excitement and humility, we share Empowered Community Services' first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This marks the beginning of a formal and structured approach to reconciliation and ensures that we are open and transparent in our commitment to reconciliation.

The development of this RAP was informed by a series of important conversations that took place over many months across the organisation. It came at a time when a lot of impactful events were happening across the nation, which led to employees asking how can they get more involved in reconciliation, and we, as a small business, can do our part.

Reconciliation is a journey for all Australians – as individuals, communities, organisations and importantly, as a nation. Our Reflect RAP is an acknowledgement of our organisation's role in this journey and our commitment to taking action that contributes to reconciliation in Australia.

Our organisation is built on developing the capacity of the people we support through working towards clearly defined goals. Although success is not always found immediately, our Participants persevere, they are supported to find out what works, and ultimately they achieve their goals. This approach mirrors our reconciliation journey – it is a long-term process that requires patience, openness and a willingness to learn.

This commitment is crucial to reconciliation, and we will use this mindset as the driver for our RAP.

We hope our commitment inspires other small businesses like us to reflect on their Reconciliation journey and how they can also create their own Reflect RAP to play their part in reconciliation.

On behalf of the RAP Working Group, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this process so far, including Jasmin Craciun, Tyrone Gordon, First Nations people in our community, Empowered employees, and staff at Reconciliation Australia for their guidance.

It is with great pleasure that we release our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan.

Jonathon Power
Managing Director





Empowered Community Services acknowledges the Awabakal people, who have continued to nurture and care for the land on which our organisation stands, since long before our organisation was established. We respectfully acknowledge all Elders past, present and emerging, and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of First Nations peoples.



We acknowledge the importance of providing culturally sensitive services that meet community and individual needs.

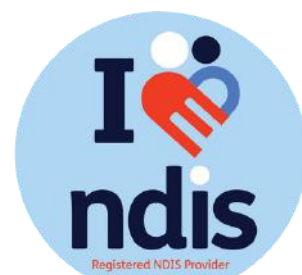
We are committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of our services and welcome all people irrespective of age, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation and gender.



EMPOWERED COMMUNITY SERVICES

Enriching the lives of

People with a disability



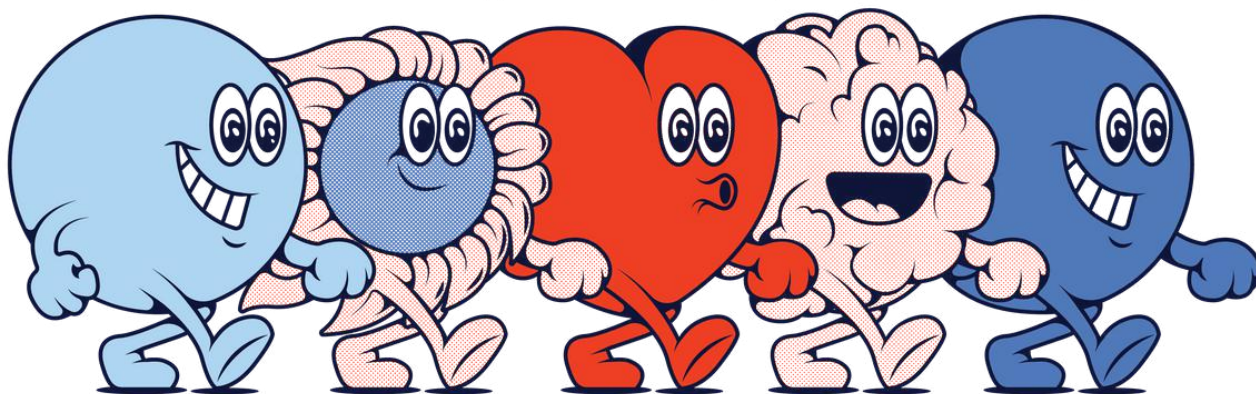
OUR BUSINESS

Empowered Community Services

Empowered Community Services (ECS) is a Lake Macquarie based disability service provider that supports participants of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Our services include Community Access and Capacity Building, where we have supported over 500 individuals to access the community and develop capacity. This is through a person-centred approach where the participant is placed at the centre of the service. The focus is on the person and what they can do, not their condition or disability. Our support focuses on achieving the participant's aspirations and is tailored to their needs and unique circumstances. We also offer holidays as an alternative to traditional respite, as well as group activities for participants of similar age and interests to increase participants' capacity, make new friends, and increase social and community participation. We offer Support Coordination to help participants navigate their NDIS plan and the different services they can access with their funds. Our experienced and knowledgeable team of Support Coordinators work as the main point of contact for participants and their families to help access a range of supports and services, including things like equipment, therapies, and education. We also offer School Leavers Employment Support (SLES) which is an NDIS-funded program designed to support young people in their transition into sustainable employment.

Our Mission & Vision

Mission: Enriching the lives of people with a disability.



Vision: A world where disability is understood, accepted and normalised.

Our mission is to enrich the lives of people with a disability. Our vision is a world where disability is understood, accepted, and normalised. By including our participants in the decision-making process, we aim to exercise their choice and control over their desired service. Services ensure that each participant is an active and belonging member of their community and enables them to contribute in some way, shape or form. Since the beginning of Empowered, we have always promoted real-world experiences that enable participants to share ordinary places. We understand that our participants are more than participants, they are people, each with their own story and background. Our organisation believes that no matter your age, background, or disability you should have access to meaningful opportunities to achieve at your full potential.

We employ over 80 people across the Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, and the Hunter Region areas, with 2.5% of our total staff identifying as First Nations people. We work closely with our disability support workers, participants, and stakeholders to implement our vision through our regional geographical reach. We currently have an office space and a group space, accessible to all participants, located in Cardiff, Lake Macquarie.

Empowered was founded in 2017, after identifying an industry need to support individuals with complex disability needs. Our organisation recognises that people with disabilities may identify as First Nations Peoples each with their own unique set of circumstances and support needs, and with our current RAP, are investigating ways in which we can deepen our understanding of First Nations histories and cultures to bring about awareness of the NDIS and find ways in which our organisation can contribute and make a difference. Our person-centred ethos promotes a genuine, mutually respectful, two-way relationship that we believe will be beneficial in our reconciliation journey.

We believe in equal opportunities for everyone and the NDIS has brought great change for people with a disability. Our organisation intends on ensuring that all Australians, including First Nations Peoples, have access to the support, resources and services to enrich their lives.



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

Reconciliation Australia welcomes Empowered Community Services to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.

Empowered Community Services joins a network of more than 1,100 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate – allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes. These outcomes contribute toward the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also, increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.

This Reflect RAP enables Empowered Community Services to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations Empowered Community Services, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia



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Relationships



Respect



Opportunities



Governance

OUR RAP



Empowered Community Services

At the beginning of 2020, our leadership team held several meetings to discuss different topics and issues surrounding First Nations peoples.

We were notified that a recent government program that supported First Nations peoples to access the NDIS had its funding reduced and, as a result, had lost a significant number of staff for the program. Our leadership team agreed that our organisation had a social responsibility and needed to play its part in reconciliation. We acknowledged that our organisation was growing quickly and that we wanted to ensure that our organisation was an Equal Opportunity Employer and recruited First Nations peoples as a part of our employment strategy.

We were also aware of issues occurring both nationally and globally. Using the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement to analyse the landscape of contemporary Australian society for First Nations peoples, we realised that our mission and vision in the disability sector can be translated to work in the journey towards reconciliation. Disability itself has previously been defined by the medical model which says people are disabled by their impairments or differences and looks at what is 'wrong' with the person, not what the person needs. The medical model of disability creates low expectations and leads to people losing independence, choice, and control in their lives. In contrast, the social model of disability is a more progressive way of looking at disability, where a person's activities are limited not by their impairment or condition but by their environment. In this model, barriers are consequences of the way society is organised, derogatory attitudes, and social exclusion. We chose to develop our RAP and begin our journey towards reconciliation because of the parallels that are apparent here, and the systemic barriers that have contributed to social stigma and a world built for, and subsequently privileging, specific types of people over others. The change from the medical to social model moves from a lens of deficit to a lens of strength and empowerment. This resonates with the experiences of First Nations peoples as the legacy of colonisation and the continuation of colonial violence presents itself through various injustices and inequities. However, imperative to the reconciliation journey is a progression to emphasise strength and resilience rather than need and deficiency, to build cultural strength and reclaim autonomy. This RAP allows us to put our vision of a more inclusive world that values all ways of being into action and to hold ourselves accountable to our core values of consistency, development, diversity, trust, understanding, and respect.

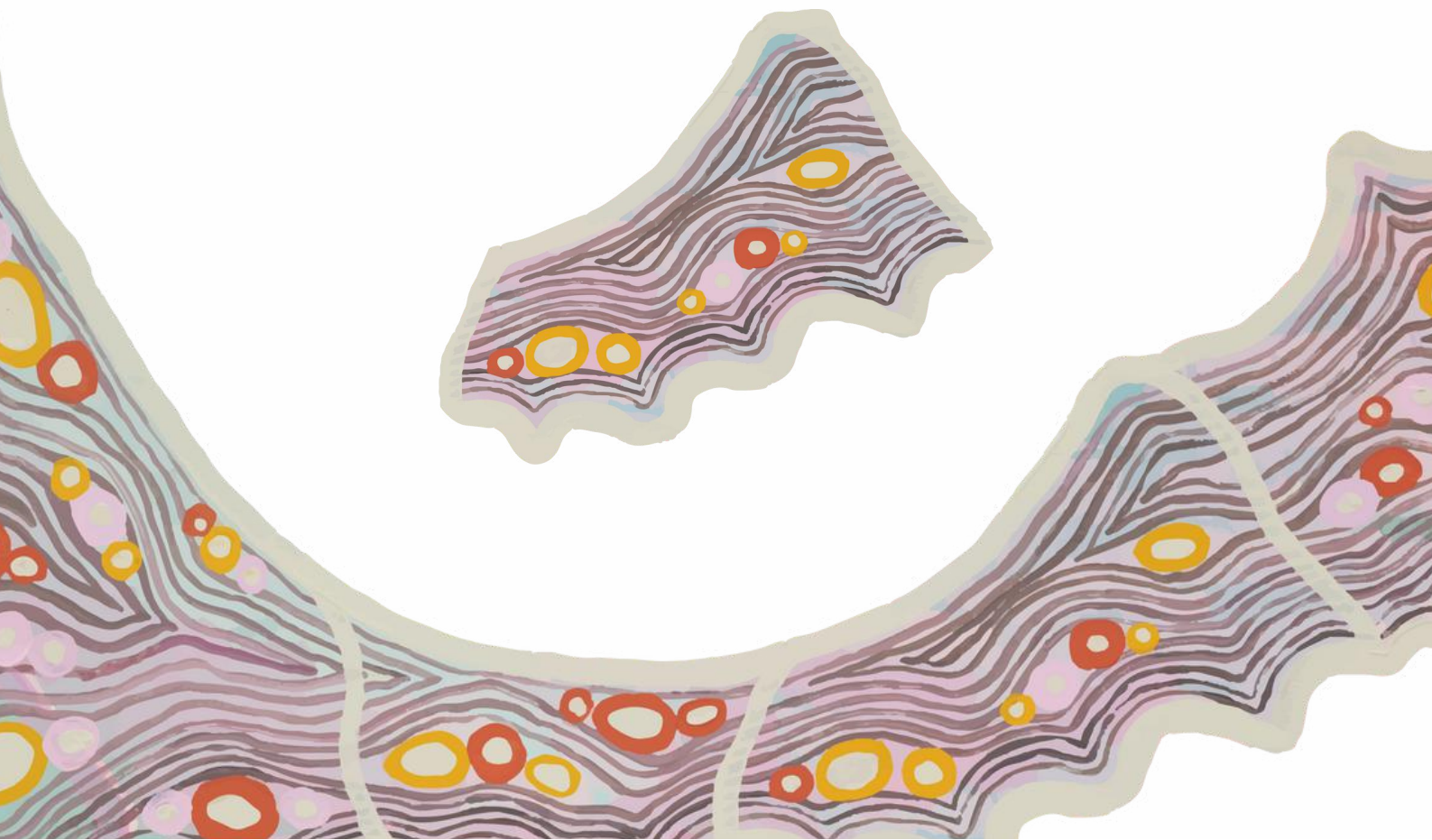
The development and implementation of this RAP will be championed by our Disability and Inclusion Officer with the objective of building Empowered Community Services' corporate social responsibility. They have created an Internal RAP Working Group that will be responsible for implementing this Reflect RAP.

For the development of this RAP, we have consulted with local members of the Aboriginal community including Tyrone Gordon, a proud Wiradjuri man as well as an employee of ECS and a member of the internal RAP Group, to ensure that this RAP is authentic, that the actions taken are not tokenistic and that the outcomes are true to Empowered Community Services core values.

Our organisation has had a proactive approach in the lead-up to the launch of our Reflect RAP and we have been able to participate in a number of important initiatives;

- Our Internal RAP Working Group (RWG) held regular meetings throughout 2020 & 2021.
- We liaised with external services to provide cultural awareness training to increase the organisation's understanding of First Nations cultures.
- We met with members of the First Nations communities to discuss the purpose of our RAP and explore ways in which we could collaborate in the future.
- Our RWG planned and organised our first event - NAIDOC Week 2020, held at Blackbutt Reserve which included a Smoking Ceremony, Yulunga Traditional Indigenous Games, and Traditional Dancing.
- We met with Barkindji, Malyangapa Artist Jasmine Craciun to discuss the vision for our RAP and how our organisation could contribute to reconciliation. Jasmine expressed her interest in working directly with participants to share her knowledge of traditional cultures through the practice of art in our group space.
- We collaborated with Jasmine on our RAP Artwork and the development of First Nations specific brochures.
- We were able to increase the number of First Nations peoples who were employed at our organisation. First Nations peoples now make up 2.5% of our total staff, with an intent to increase this to 10% in the next 12 months.
- We held National Reconciliation Week celebrations at Lake Macquarie which served as an opportunity for our organisation to learn more about First Nations cultures through Story Telling from Elders and Traditional Dancing.

Since embarking on our Reconciliation Journey, we have developed a strong appreciation for First Nations cultures. Feedback from stakeholders and members of the community has been positive and we are proud that we have been able to achieve some of the milestones that we had originally set out to achieve. We will continue to learn about First Nations cultures and continue to play our part in reconciliation in the years to come.



ARTWORK

Jasmine Craciun



Our RAP features original artwork created by artist Jasmine Craciun. Jasmine is a proud Barkindji, Malyangapa woman who grew up in Newcastle, the Traditional Lands of the Awabakal people. Here are Jasmine's own words describing the story behind her artwork:

“Through the creation of this work I hoped to represent all the wonderful aspects and goals discussed within the Empowered RAP. The colour palette was based on the colours used by Empowered Community Services marketing and branding. I feel the colour palette was also influenced by the interactions I had with the employees at Empowered and while visiting the sewing group. The blue and pastel tones to me translate a sense of calm, belonging, acceptance which is the personal experience I had while being introduced and shown around the Empowered Community Services HQ.

The two big symbols at the top of the artwork are the Aboriginal traditional symbols for people. These are the biggest features of the artwork as I wanted to show that Empowered is a community and people-based service. I wanted to show the two people in different colours portraying empowered as blue and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, community and organisations in pink. They are facing each other to share and disperse cultural knowledge to make Empowered a stronger and better service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the local community as a whole. This is visualised in the surrounding yellow “blobs” connected by lines.





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"These "blobs" of knowledge and culture help support both Empowered Community Services and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through a shared understanding and cultural collaboration."

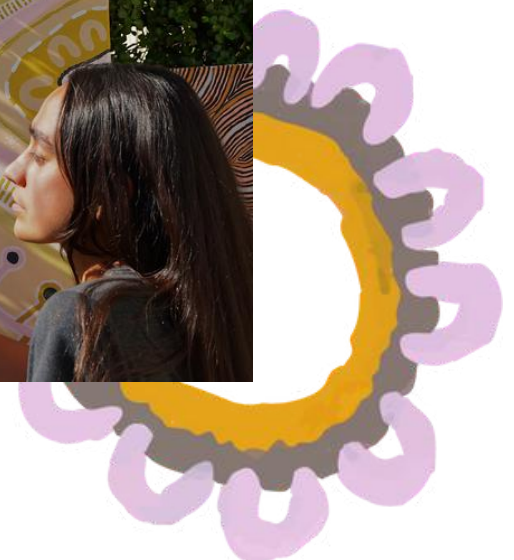
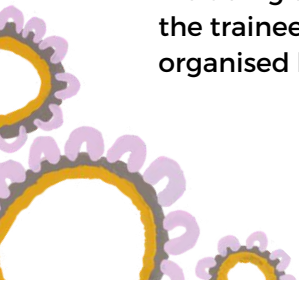
”

To the right of these symbols are circles with the same symbols for people gathered in a group. These represent Empowered Community Services supporting and helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to connect with the NDIS and get the support they need. I wanted this part of the work to feel like the people were a strong united group there to help one another. I hoped that painting a big group of people accessing this kind of support would be representative of the work Empowered is trying to do to break down stigmas about mental health and disability support within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Hopefully, a large group of people gives the idea of this not being something you have to work through on your own and the way that Empowered and the NDIS can support and help you through struggles you may be dealing with. I also feel these circles of people together are a good representation of the group activities run by Empowered and the sense of community gained from those activities and group meetings.

The row of circles wrapping below the large people symbols represent Empowered Community Services promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within their company. This row of circles aim to portray Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at all levels of the company including those working their way through the traineeship program currently being organised by Empowered.

The lines crossing through the work are a contemporary take on the traditional art of my people, the Barkindji people, and their line work. In this work, I see the lines representing a topographic map and the way that Empowered is working across not only Newcastle but also the Hunter and Lake Macquarie. The coloured circles represent the many diverse people that are a part of Empowered Community Services, staff and participants and the positive effects of their work all across our local region. I wanted the bottom plant to represent the steady and wonderful growth of Empowered as an important community service for those living with a disability. Each circle coming from the main stem of the plant represents Empowered Community Services meeting goals and changing lives for the better."

Jasmine Craciun
Barkindji, Malyangapa woman



RELATIONSHIPS



ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify First Nations stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence. 	<p>July 2022</p>	<p>Managing Director</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations. 	<p>July 2022</p>	<p>Diversity & Inclusion Officer</p>
<p>2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff. 	<p>April 2023</p>	<p>Marketing Officer</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event. 	<p>27 May- 3 June 2023</p>	<p>Employment Support Manager/ Support Worker</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW. 	<p>27 May- 3 June 2023</p>	<p>Managing Director</p>
<p>3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff. 	<p>July 2022</p>	<p>Managing Director</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey. 	<p>August 2022</p>	<p>Service Manager</p>

- Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.

July 2022

Employee Support Manager/ Support Worker

4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.

- Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.

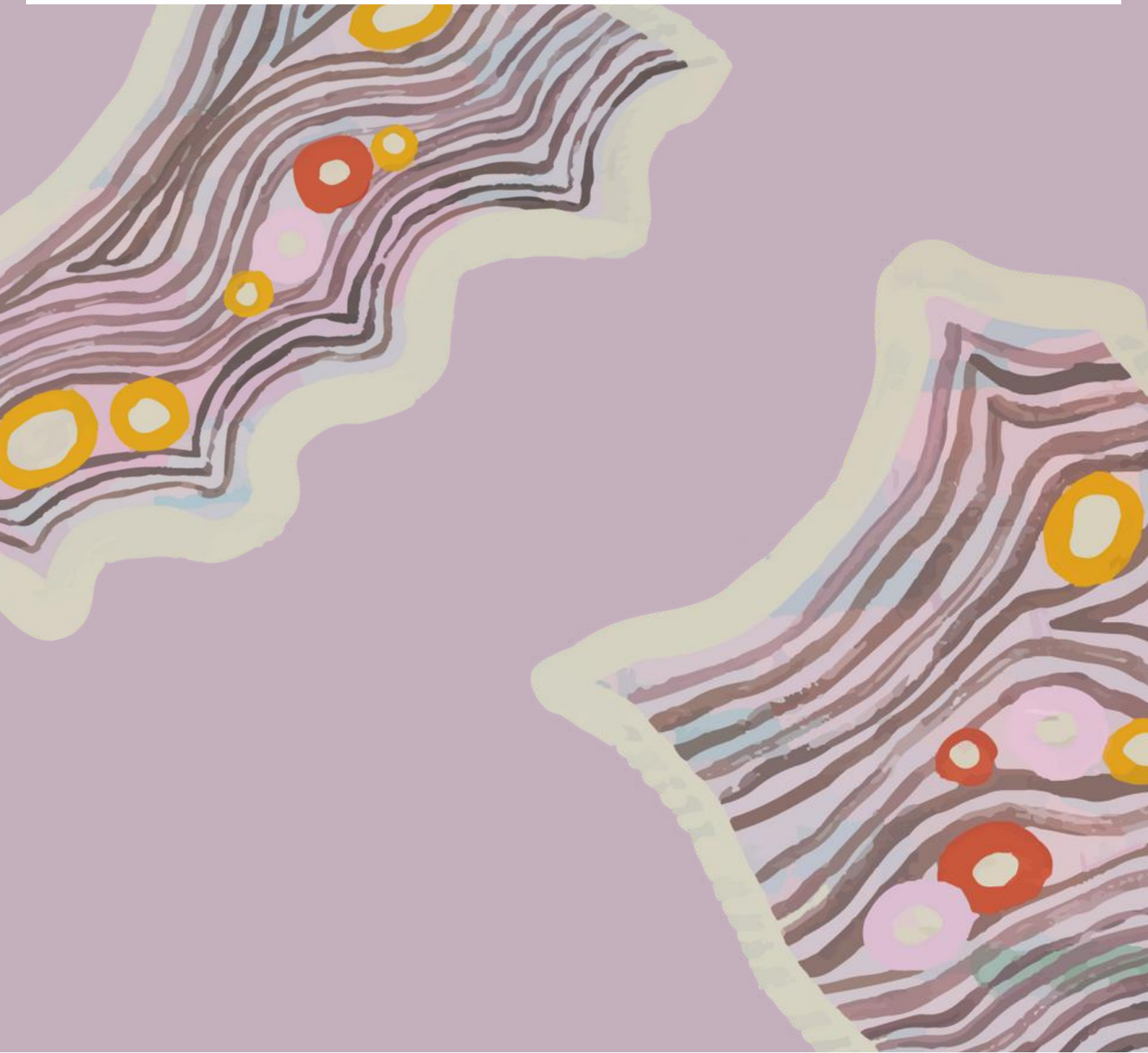
September 2022

HR Manager

- Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.

September 2022

HR Manager



RESPECT



ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation. 	<p>December 2022</p>	<p>Diversity & Inclusion Officer / Employment Support Manager</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation. 	<p>September 2022</p>	<p>Diversity & Inclusion Officer/ Employment Support Manager/ Support Worker</p>
<p>6. Demonstrate respect to First Nations peoples by observing cultural protocols.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an understanding of local Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area. 	<p>October 2022</p>	<p>Diversity & Inclusion Officer</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols 	<p>August 2022</p>	<p>Employment Support Manager/ Support Worker</p>
<p>7. Build respect for First Nations cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week. 	<p>July 2022, June 2023</p>	<p>Marketing Officer</p>

- Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area.

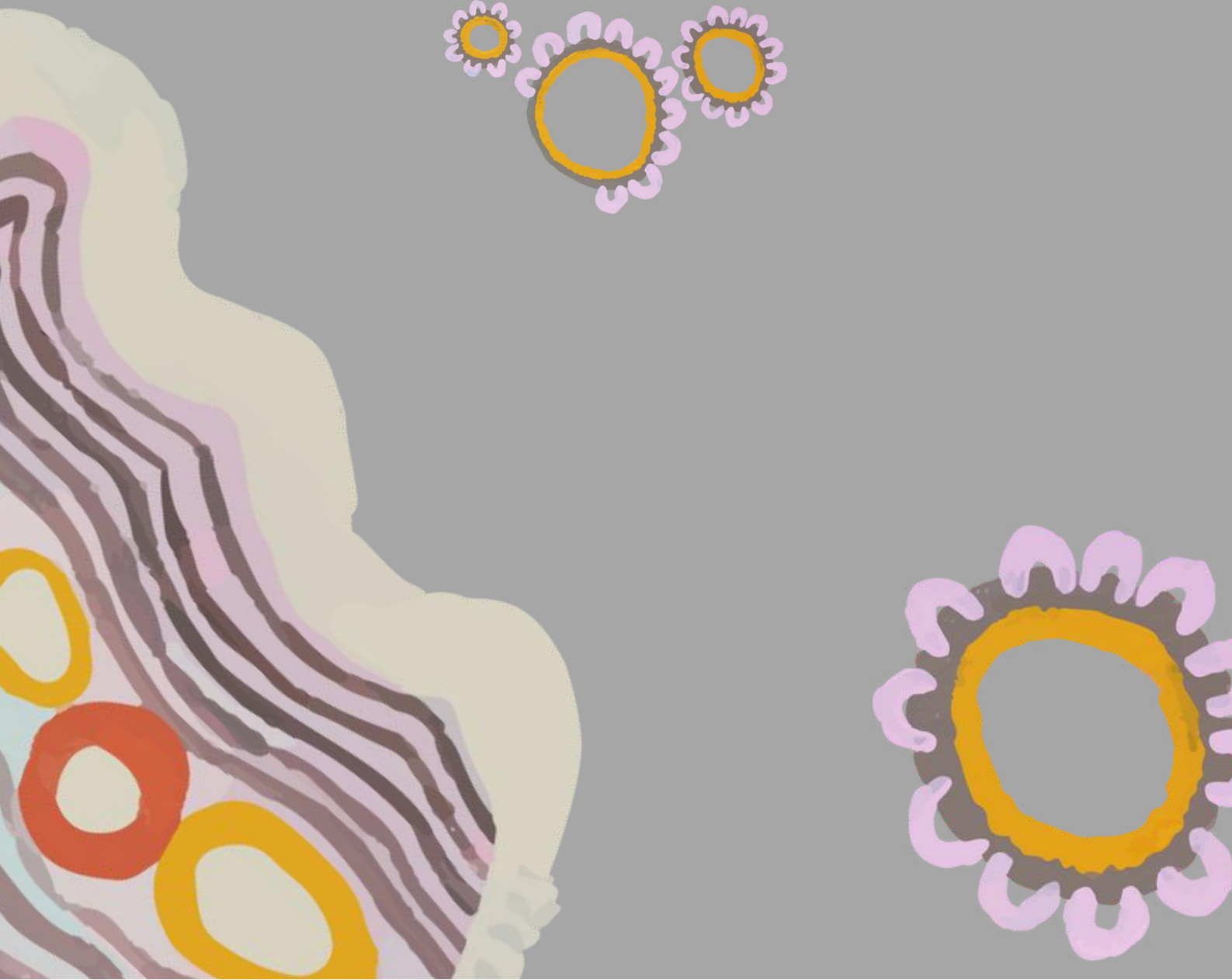
July 2022,
June 2023

Marketing
Officer

- RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.

First week
in July
2022, 2023

Lead: Diversity
& Inclusion
Officer
Support: RWC



OPPORTUNITIES



ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
8. Improve employment outcomes by increasing First Nations recruitment, retention and professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a business case for First Nations employment within our organisation.	December 2022	HR Manager / Managing Director
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build understanding of current First Nations staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	November 2022	HR Manager / Service Manager
9. Increase First Nations supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a business case for procurement from First Nations owned businesses.	October 2022	Events & Program Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investigate Supply Nation membership.	August 2022	Diversity & Inclusion Officer



GOVERNANCE



ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>10. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a RWG to govern RAP implementation. 	July 2022	Diversity & Inclusion Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG. 	July 2022	Diversity & Inclusion Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish First Nations representation on the RWG. 	July 2022	Diversity & Inclusion Officer
<p>11. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define resource needs for RAP implementation. 	July 2022	Managing Director
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments. 	July 2022	Managing Director
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments. 	July 2022	Diversity & Inclusion Officer
<p>12. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence. 	June 2023 and annually	Diversity & Inclusion Officer

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire. 	1st August 2023 and annually	Diversity & Inclusion Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia. 	30 September 2023 and annually	Diversity & Inclusion Officer
13. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP. 	June 2023	Diversity & Inclusion Officer

Contact details for public enquiries about our RAP.

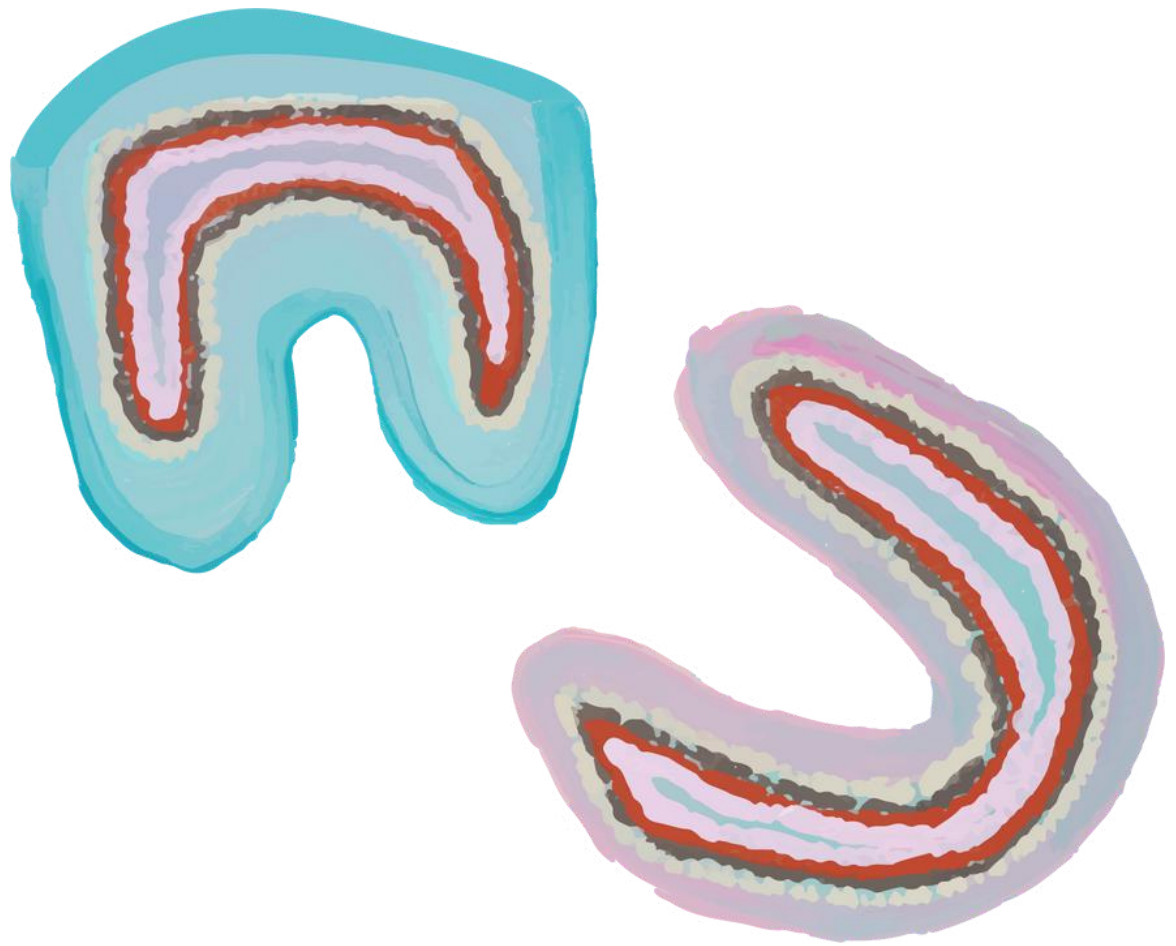
Name: Stephanie Cassel

Position: Diversity & Inclusion Officer

Phone: 0406 447 857

Email: stephaniecassel@empoweredcs.com





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Empowered Community Services

admin@empoweredcs.com

Ph: (02) 4054 9286

empoweredcommunityservices.com