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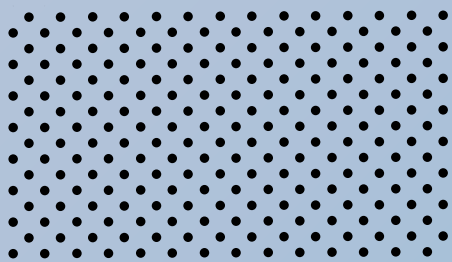
MAGAZINE



WINTER 2026

ISSUE 122

 **The Gender Centre**
Est.1983



August 31st 2pm - 4.30pm

Kite Street Community Health clinic

Orange

BINDER ACCESS AFTERNOON

ORANGE SEXUAL HEALTH TEAM AND THE GENDER
CENTRE INVITE YOU TO COME BY AND TRYOUT OR
PICK UP A NEW BINDER FOR FREE,

WHILE HAVING A SNACK AND CHECKING IN WITH
THE TEAM ABOUT SAFE BINDING AND FITTING

Everyone over 16
welcome,

If you are under 16 a
parent needs to attend
with you

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CULTURE, ACCESS AND THE SYSTEMS THAT **STILL** FALL SHORT

As we mark NAIDOC Week, we celebrate the strength, resilience and enduring cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is also a time to reflect on what meaningful inclusion and equitable access look like in practice.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the conversation has never been solely about visibility or recognition. It has always been about access—access to culturally safe services, secure housing, quality healthcare and systems that recognise lived experience and respond with respect.

These are conversations that resonate across many communities, including transgender and gender diverse people, although each community's experiences are unique and should never be treated as interchangeable.

At The Gender Centre, we are continually reminded that the systems people rely on are not always neutral. They are shaped by assumptions about identity, family, stability and support that do not necessarily reflect the realities of those seeking assistance. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

transgender and gender diverse people, these experiences often intersect in ways that create additional barriers to accessing services that are both culturally safe and gender affirming.

The challenge is not always one of deliberate exclusion. More often, it is a misalignment between the way systems have been designed and the realities of the people expected to navigate them.

Policies may reference inclusion, and services may genuinely want to be welcoming, but meaningful access requires more than good intentions. Too often, individuals still find themselves explaining their identity, advocating for culturally appropriate responses or moving between disconnected services that do not communicate effectively with one another.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, navigating fragmented systems while also seeking culturally safe care creates an additional burden at times when support is needed most.



What experience continues to show us is that outcomes improve when services are connected, culturally informed and grounded in community.

Achieving this requires more than policy statements. It requires:

- investment in culturally safe, community-led responses;
- a workforce equipped with practical cultural capability, not simply awareness;
- integrated service systems that reduce complexity for the people using them; and
- accountability to ensure that inclusion is reflected in everyday practice, not just organisational values.

At The Gender Centre, we remain committed to delivering integrated, wrap-around support that responds to the realities of people's lives. Through housing, counselling, peer support, outreach and family services, we continue to work alongside communities to ensure our services are respectful, accessible and responsive to individual needs.

NAIDOC Week reminds us that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must continue to guide conversations about culture, community and self-determination. It also reminds us that inclusion cannot simply be declared—it must be demonstrated through the way services are designed, delivered and continually improved.

Recognition is important, but recognition alone does not create access.

Policy is important, but policy alone does not create safety.

If we are serious about improving outcomes, we must continue to build systems that are culturally safe, equitable and centred on the people they exist to serve.

Phinn Borg
Executive Director
The Gender Centre

PRIDE MONTH

2026



June saw the Pride festival across NSW (and the country). The theme of the festival this year was Connected In Colour. Glenn Hansen, co-ordinator, Sydney Pride Festival. Was quoted as saying the theme: "Connected in Colour is about celebrating the threads that tie us together as a community. No matter our differences, we are united by Pride." Accordingly this theme can also highlight and honour the strength and beauty that comes from standing together as one diverse community across all the people represented in Pride.

Throughout the month, there are opportunities to participate in parades, festivals and events to foster inclusivity, promote understanding and celebrate the diversity the LGBTIQ+ community.

Transgender individuals are a central part of Pride Month, as trans women and gender-nonconforming people, such as Marsha P.

Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, led the 1969 Stonewall riots that sparked the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement, with Pride Month commemorating this. So, for Transgender and Gender Diverse people this part of history is worth remembering and commemorating.

Pride month celebration however is not without its challenges for some people. The issue at its core that some have expressed is that June is only one month in a year and when Pride Month comes to a close, it's important to remember that Pride in community and of self doesn't end on June 30th.

Pride lives in everyday moments in being unapologetically yourself, in supporting one another, and in continuing the fight for equality and acceptance. Pride is more than just the celebrations. Pride is founded in history, resilience, community, and visibility – Pride is not a one month event, it can be an

all year round experience which recognises the everyday work of creating spaces where people feel safe, seen, respected, and able to be themselves.

Pride can live in the conversations that are shared, the voices that can be amplified, and the choices people make - even when no one is watching.

When June drew to a close, rainbow logos began to fade from company profiles, and social media feeds have moved on from Pride-themed celebrations. But for TGD people the realities of being yourself in Australia (or wherever you are in the world) don't change on July 1. The barriers don't stop when the month ends.

The real impact comes from what happens behind the scenes and beyond June. Real inclusion happens in the everyday decisions that shape culture and policy. To make impactful change, the normalising inclusion at every level is key. Do people use correct names and pronouns? (for example). Embedding inclusion means making sure that safety, equity and respect are a standard expectation every single day of the year.

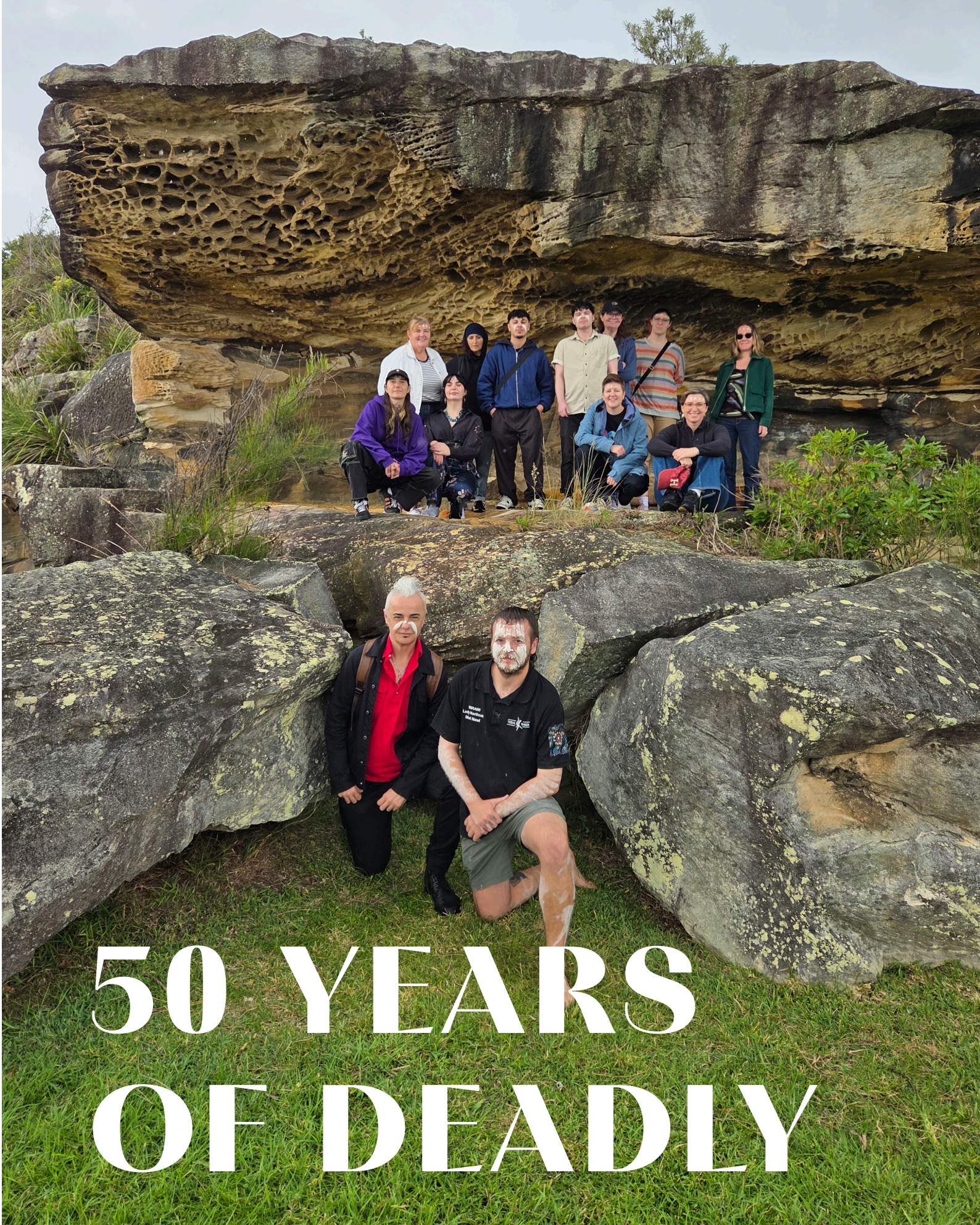
Don't shy away from conversations that are complex or uncomfortable. Whether it's about unconscious bias, systemic

discrimination, or accountability. Pride happens as a result of the everyday moments of authenticity, advocacy, being heard or seen. July may signal the conclusion of Pride Month, but don't let that stop you from showing your Pride. Continue to learn, advocate, and be active in your community.

For Allies: Year-round allyship requires the willingness to have honest conversations about privilege, unconscious bias, and the ways our systems can exclude people even without malicious intent. It's not enough to mean well. We must commit to learning, listening, and most importantly, changing. That might look like reviewing our own internal practices with an inclusion lens, educating yourself on issues important to TGD communities, or advocating for change. Mistakes might happen, but staying silent or inactive ensures the status quo continues. Real allies show up, especially when it's uncomfortable.

The people you celebrated in June don't get to switch it off. Your queer employees, your TGD friends, relatives, acquaintances or even colleagues who spent the month feeling briefly, genuinely seen — they're still here. Still watching and hoping that your support is real and not seasonal.

NAIDOC



50 YEARS
OF DEADLY

National NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia in the first week of July each year (Sunday to Sunday). NAIDOC Week celebrates and recognises the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is an opportunity for all Australians to learn about First Nations histories and cultures and to participate in celebrations of the oldest, continuous living cultures on Earth. It is an invitation to all Australians to connect with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by attending activities and events hosted throughout the week (www.naidoc.org.au)

Fifty Years of Deadly is not only the theme of this week in July 2026 as a counter of the number of years that NAIDOC existed. It also marks further aspects of NAIDOC. This year and this theme prompts people to consider the history of NAIDOC and the rise in Deadly Pride and Voices of Aboriginal People, the stories, marches protests, language, art, and leadership

The theme is a tribute to the people who have worked tirelessly over these fifty years, showcasing their Deadly Spirit, Determination and Strengths. These people include; the Elders who raised their voices and stood their ground, the people who co-ordinated the events and the other organisers, the artists who turned resistance into expression, and the communities and people who showed up. We take time in this week to remind ourselves of what it took to raise voices, awareness and empowerment and celebrate this Proud history: the strength, courage and determination of generations of people who refused to be silenced

"NAIDOC has always been more than a week — it's a platform, a protest, a celebration, and a statement of survival"
(NAIDOC website)

The theme is not only backwards looking as this however is not the end point of the journey it is merely a reminder of what has been achieved. It's also about the present. what Pride and Deadly Spirit looks like in 2026: grounded in culture and becoming stronger in our identity. Aboriginal People now lead change across all aspects of life from health and education and family to, business, environmental and land care matters as well as in the arts where our music, paintings and dance. This Deadly Spirit allows for the telling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait stories, identities, needs lives and with their own words, voices and, on their own terms.

Lastly NAIDOC also about looking forwards and into the future. What does the next 50 years look like? By celebrating the achievements of the past 50 years, young people can grow up proud knowing their voices will make a difference and that they do have Deadly power. The ongoing fight for justice sits with them as they continue their story, inspired by their Elders achievements, with a desire for change to recognise language, culture , knowledge and connection, as well as a history that spans millennia that deserves celebration and respect

THE IMPORTANCE OF COUNTRY FOR HEALING AND CARE

Especially when Country is not nearby

Country is a word that holds many different meanings for Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, especially given the diversity across our beautiful and vast continent.

At its most fundamental: Country is a proper noun, and should be capitalised when written. It is referred to in the same way you would speak about a person. For example, We Listen to Country; Country needs time to heal. Country is the term often used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. But it is more than this, it also contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity. It also encompasses relationships, including: relationships with plants, relationships with animals and relationships with Ancestors.

These relationships within Country are grounded in reciprocity. Reciprocity is about mutual respect and exchange. It is about keeping balance. It is expected that people take only what is needed, so natural

resources are never exhausted. When something that is needed is taken from Country, like a bush medicine or drinking water, adding value in other ways, becomes the reciprocal action. This relationship that is at the core of connection to Country, is deeply significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, good health is not just the absence of disease and physical symptoms, it is the state of harmony between body, mind, spirit and environment. When illness happens, it is seen as a disruption to this harmony, and can at times be linked to spiritual or emotional factors, as well as physical ones. Country and people's well-being is intertwined with maintaining a strong connection to it.

For some TGD Brotherboys and Sistergirls their life experience has meant they have needed to leave Country. This has been to access affirming care, information or even the singular journey of self-exploration to find their authentic self and identity.

In leaving Country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples do not leave behind connection. It is important to look for ways that Country can still inform, guide, care and heal. Strategies for connection can look like some of these ideas:



Find time where possible for on-Country excursions



Visit community gardens with native plants



Participate in urban bush regeneration projects



Cultural immersion through language revival



Join events such as art and storytelling led by Elders



Join yarning events to hear stories and histories or connections to Country



Participate in community programs that foster cultural continuity and environmental stewardship

Spiritual Connection

Maintaining a strong connection with the land and ancestors, through mindfulness techniques that have some of the following steps:



Use Sound, scent, sight and touch which are all really powerful tools for helping you connect to land and spirit.



Find time for yourself to be purposeful in one, some or all of these ideas (or more that you can find that remind you of Country)



Pull up a soundscape or music, like a didgeridoo or native birds, and immerse yourself in the experience.



Crush gum leaves in your hands and smell them



Listen to the waves at a beach and smell the salt in the air



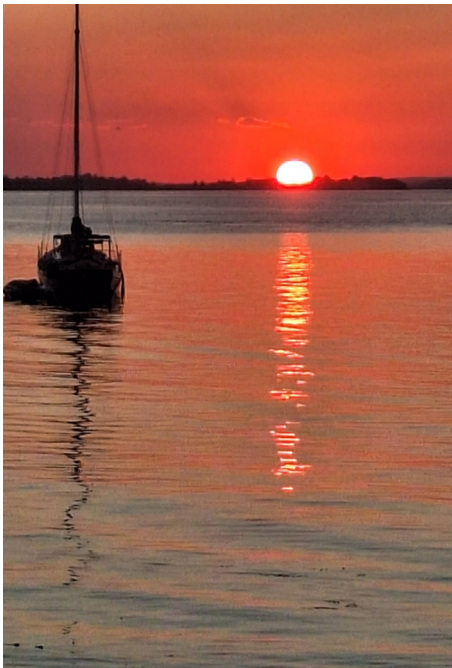
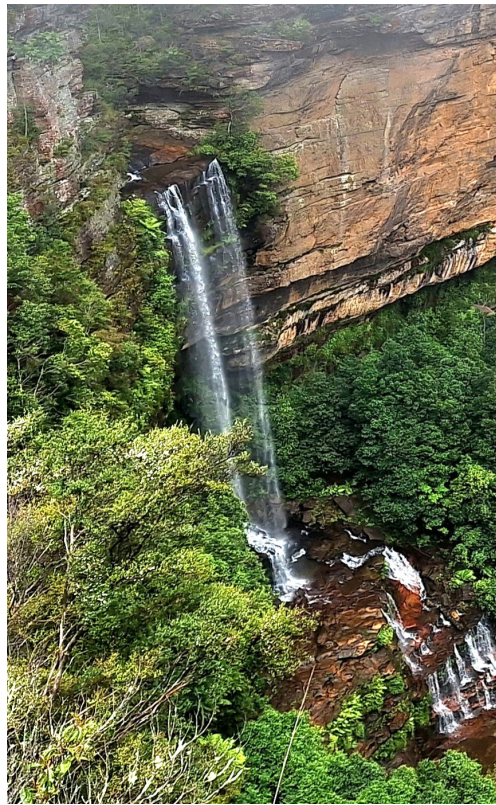
Be still and watch a flickering fire

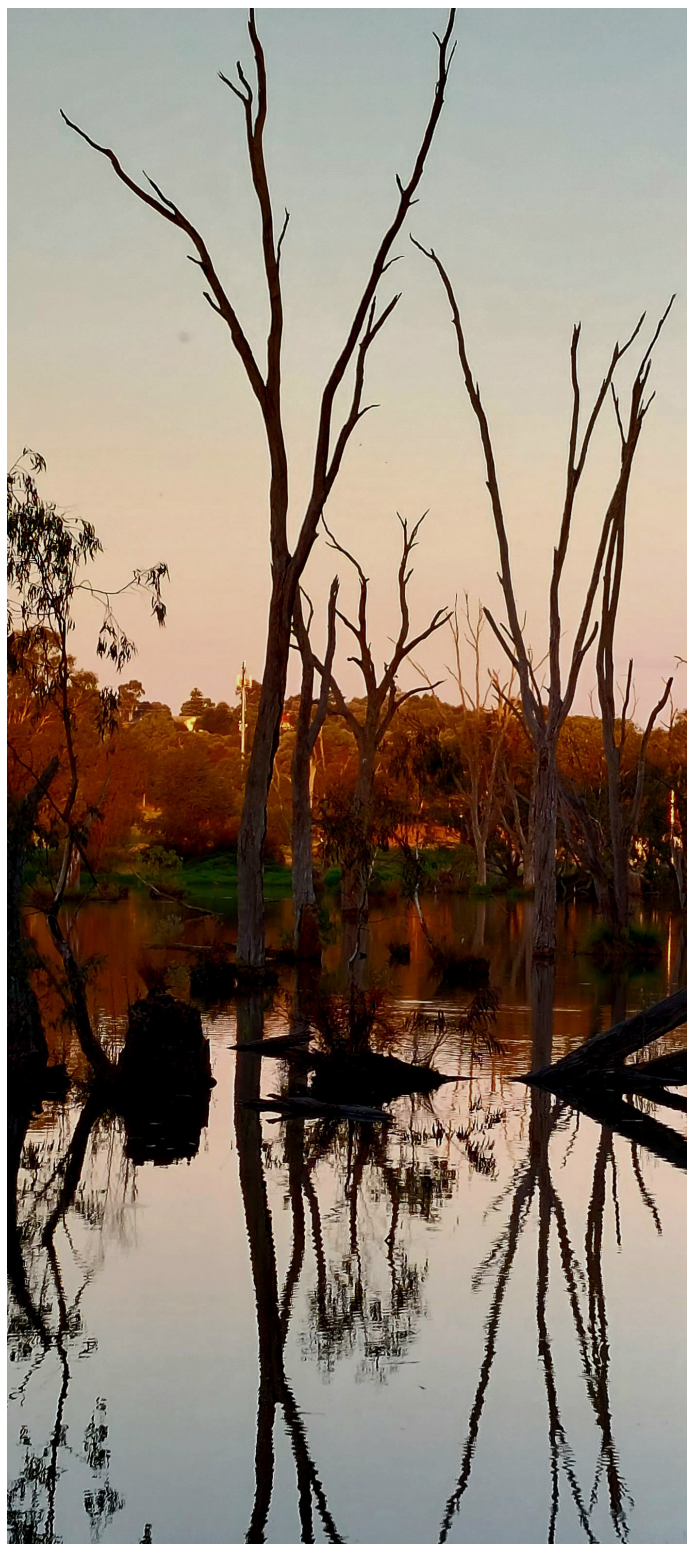
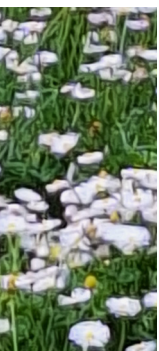


Run your hands through dirt or stand barefoot on grass and breath

In these moments you do not have to be clear-headed, but practicing Dadirri can be useful. Deep listening to seek clarity on thoughts like, what is Country telling me right now as I sit, listen, feel or smell? Or, how is my body mind and spirit connecting within myself and also with Country? One last thought as you sit, could be consideration of what is Country asking me to give back for all it has

provided me? Not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait people know their Mob or the Country of their origin. This is not something to be ashamed of or limited by. If you're unsure of your Mob or Country, don't let this stop you from connecting and practising mindfulness. Find a spot that feels safe for you and let that Country absorb you, heal you and feed you in that moment.





GROWING OLDER AS A KOORI SISTERGIRL

Culture, Identity and the Right to Belong

**"I've lived through removal, racism, discrimination, illness and loss.
But I've also lived through love, family, community and pride.
That's what has kept me here."**

Kooncha Brown

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trans women, sistergirls and brotherboys, ageing is about far more than growing older. It's about carrying a lifetime of resilience while navigating health and aged care systems that too often fail to recognise both our cultural identity and our gender identity.

My name is Kooncha, and I grew up in a small Aboriginal community on the far south coast of New South Wales. My people are Yuin, Gunaikurnai, Djadjawurrung, Wotjobaluk and Jaitmatang. Like many Aboriginal people of my generation, my life was shaped early by government policies that separated families. My older brother and I were removed by welfare authorities and taken to Wallaga Lake Aboriginal Reserve before eventually being reunited with our mother after the 1967 Referendum. Those experiences could easily have defined my life, but they never defined who I was.

What shaped me most was family. In our community, children were raised collectively. Mothers, aunties, cousins and grandparents all shared the responsibility of caring for one another. That network of love gave me a strong sense of belonging, even as I realised from a very young age that I was different.

At school I loved sport and spending time with family, but I also discovered how quickly difference could become a target. My feminine appearance attracted teasing, bullying and homophobic abuse. I left school at fifteen carrying more than a school bag, I carried the weight of trying to understand myself in a world that rarely made space for people like me.

Looking back now, I realise something important. While the outside world often judged me, my family and community largely accepted me. They knew me as one of their own. That acceptance became the foundation on which I built my life.

After leaving school, I helped care for my younger sisters and brother while supporting my mother. They would call me mum, which embarrassed my brothers. It was never simply about babysitting; it was about continuing the cycle of care that had been given to me. Family has always been at the centre of who I am.

As I grew older, my world expanded. Living in Melbourne and later travelling regularly to Sydney with two sistergirl (cousins/sisters), introduced me to other Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander sistergirls. Walking into the Rex Hotel at Kings Cross and heading up to the Taxi Club in Darlinghurst for the first time felt like discovering another family. Suddenly there were people who looked like me, understood me and had walked similar paths. For many of us, those weekends weren't simply nights out, they were places where we could finally breathe.

When I eventually moved to Sydney and began transitioning in my twenties, life became both exciting and confronting. I found friendship, chosen family and incredible support from older sistergirls who nurtured younger sistergirls entering the community. They became our mentors, our protectors and often our mothers away from home.

But I also encountered racism, transphobia and misogyny, sometimes in places where I expected acceptance. Those experiences taught me that belonging is never guaranteed, even within communities that know discrimination themselves.

Like many trans women of my generation, meaningful employment was difficult to find. Too often, sex work became one of the few available options. Determined to build a different future, I returned to study before working across community services, aged care and health.

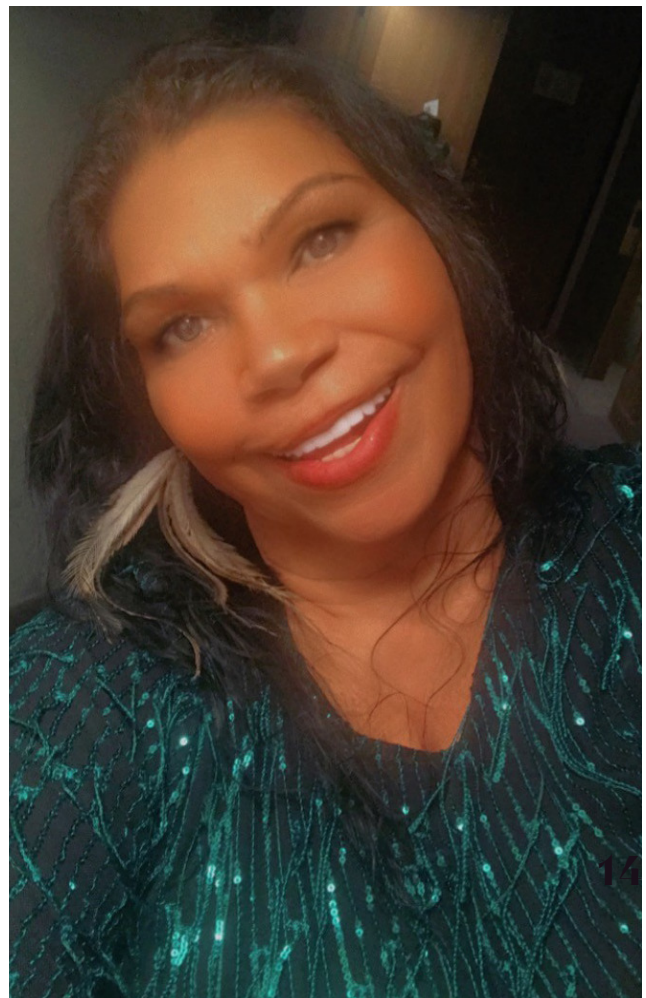
One of the greatest privileges of my career came in 1994, following the first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Gay Men's and Transgender-Sistergirl Conference near Alice Springs. That gathering marked a turning point for our communities as we responded together to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Soon afterwards I became ACON's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sistergirl/Trans Women's Project Officer. I took on the role because we had already lost too many sistergirls and trans women to HIV/AIDS, suicide, violence/murder, and I wanted to

help ensure that future generations had the support, education and hope that so many of our sisters never had. For the next decade I worked alongside communities across New South Wales with local sexual health workers, supporting people living with HIV, promoting sexual health and advocating for Aboriginal LGBTQIA+ people whose voices had too often been overlooked.

Later I worked with Aboriginal women and children escaping homelessness and domestic violence before spending more than ten years caring for my own mum after my dad's passing. Care has always been at the heart of my life. Ironically, growing older eventually meant learning how to receive care myself.

Over the years I have faced liver cancer, multiple heart attacks, triple bypass surgery, a stroke and ongoing complications from osteoporosis. Recovering has been one of the hardest chapters of my life. One hospital experience remains impossible to forget. While still recovering from major surgery and barely able to walk, I was repeatedly pressured to leave before I was well enough. I eventually discharged myself, exhausted and frightened.



The care I received afterwards from the Aboriginal Medical Service, community nurses and a close sistergirl friend restored not only my health but my faith that compassionate care still exists. That experience reinforced something many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trans people already know. Healthcare is never only about medicine. It is about being seen and it is about being respected. It is about feeling safe enough to tell your story without fear of judgement.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience significantly poorer health outcomes and develop chronic illnesses much earlier than the wider population. For trans women, sistergirls and brotherboys, those inequalities are compounded by racism, transphobia, social isolation and the long-term effects of discrimination.

Many older trans people delay seeking healthcare because they fear being misgendered or having their identity dismissed. Others rely exclusively on Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations because they feel culturally safe, even when specialist gender affirming services may not be available. Some access LGBTQIA+ services that understand gender diversity but know little about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and intergenerational trauma. Too often, we are expected to choose between cultural safety and gender affirmation. We should never have to choose.

Growing older with dignity means receiving care that honours every part of who we are, our culture, our history, our gender identity and our lived experience. The Australian Charter of Aged Care Rights makes this clear. Every older person has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to have their identity valued, to make decisions about their own care, and to live free from abuse, neglect and discrimination. These are not special rights; they are fundamental human rights.

Today I continue to receive support from organisations that understand the importance of culturally safe, gender-affirming care. Their support has made an enormous difference to my life, giving me the confidence to face the challenges of ageing with dignity, knowing I am respected for both my cultural identity and who I am as a sistergirl. It has also reminded me that no one should have to navigate ageing alone and that compassionate, inclusive care can profoundly improve our health, wellbeing and quality of life.

When I reflect on my journey, from a little Koori child growing up on the south coast, to becoming a sistergirl finding her place in the world, to now navigating ageing I don't see a story defined by hardship. I see a story of survival, strengthened by community, grounded in culture, and sustained by hope.

My hope is that future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sistergirls, brotherboys and trans people will grow older in a country where they never have to fight to have every part of themselves recognised. Because every one of us deserves to age with dignity, pride, respect and the certainty that we belong.



BROTHER BOY

Kai Clancy is a proud Wakka Wakka and Wulli Wulli Brotherboy whose journey continues to inspire Aboriginal and transgender people across Australia. His story is one of resilience, pride and connection to culture.

Growing up, Kai always carried a strong sense of cultural pride. However, he also experienced confusion and isolation as he navigated his gender identity. In many Aboriginal communities, cultural practices can involve distinct men's and women's roles. For Kai, being expected to participate in activities and dances designated for girls did not align with how he felt within himself. This created challenges as he tried to understand both his identity and his place within culture.

Despite these challenges, Kai never turned away from his Aboriginal identity. Instead, he worked to find a way to embrace culture and self. Through his transition, he found greater alignment between who he is on the inside and how he could express himself in the world. While transitioning, he participated in unisex cultural dances and has witnessed the growth of spaces where queer Aboriginal people can celebrate both their culture and identity together.

Kai speaks proudly about being accepted within his culture and believes Aboriginal culture has the capacity to embrace

Brotherboys, Sistergirls, and other gender-diverse people. Historically, diverse gender identities have existed within First Nations communities long before colonisation imposed rigid Western ideas about gender.

Kai's advocacy has also helped create visibility for other Brotherboys. When he was younger, he struggled to find stories that reflected his own experiences. While there were resources and visibility for Sistergirls, although very minimal, there was very little representation of Brotherboys. By speaking publicly and sharing his journey, Kai became the role model he once needed, helping others feel less alone and more connected.

His story is one of courage, authenticity and hope. It reminds us that culture is not diminished when people live as their true selves. Rather, it is strengthened when every person is given the opportunity to contribute, connect and belong. As more transgender Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people step forward with pride, communities continue to grow richer, stronger and more inclusive. Kai Clancy's journey encourages us to celebrate the many ways Aboriginal people experience and express identity. His story shows that there is strength in being yourself and pride in walking proudly in both culture and truth.

Jay Rihani



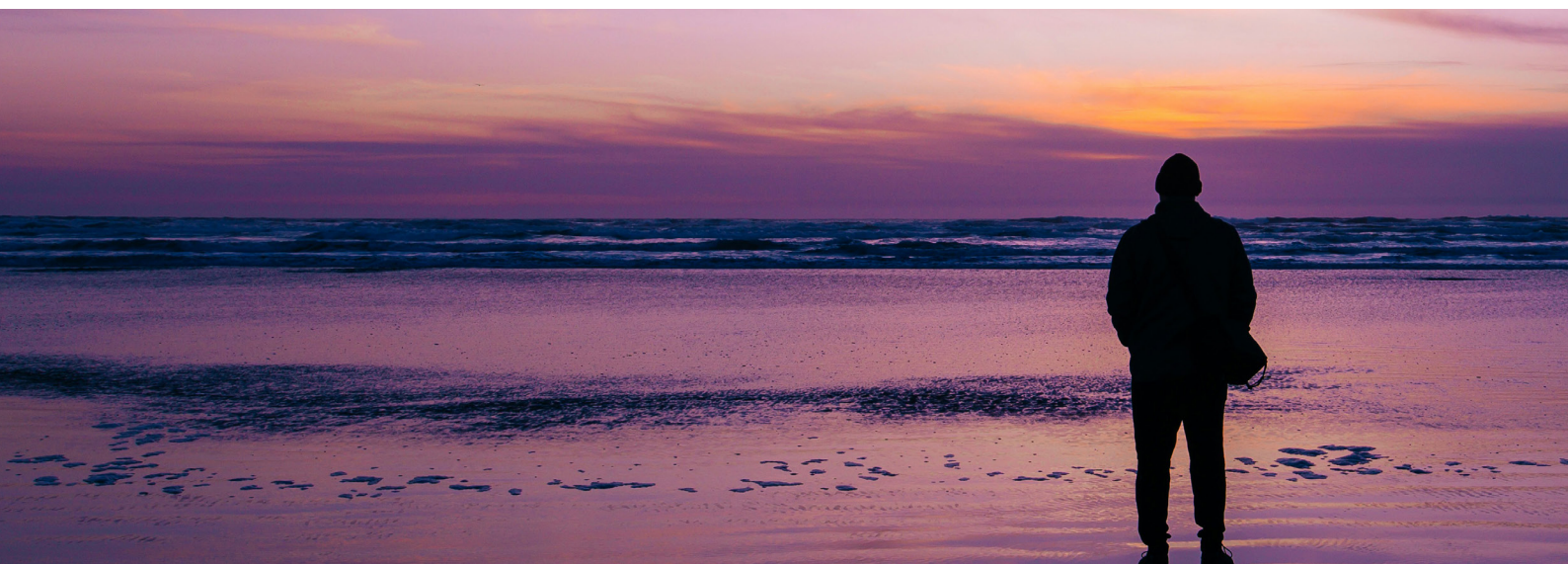
THE FOURTH ARM OF TRANSITION

Across trans and gender diverse communities, transition is often described as having three parts: social, medical, and legal. These are the steps that get researched, debated, legislated, and explained in brochures. They are the three neat boxes to tick, and milestones to reach. But if you sit down and listen to the stories of trans individuals, you might begin to realise that a fourth element of transition is unpacking and reorganising itself alongside the others. This aspect doesn't appear on any official checklist, but it impacts the stories of trans folk just as profoundly. This is the spiritual transition: the inner reorientation of meaning, identity, and belonging that occurs as people connect more and more with their authentic selves.

For some of us, spirituality is tied to religion. For others, it's nature, community, creativity, or just the internal sense that there is something bigger than us, and that we are more than the sum of our cells.

Many trans people come from religious or spiritual traditions that offered safety, community and a sense of belonging. However, in 'coming out', or realising one's authentic self is different to the one the religious community sees, transition can really complicate that connection. Some people find themselves slowly moving away from beliefs that no longer reflect their lived truth, finding it hard to stay within a community that believes their identity is a problem to be solved rather than a reality that deserves to be celebrated. In this way transition has a darker side, one that involves loss and disorientation because the rituals and world views that provided grounding are now shakey and unclear.

There is also the loss of community, if a faith-based group is no longer welcoming to someone who begins to present more authentically. This might feel like a sharper break — as there might be no change of personal religious belief, but a sense of exile



from the faith communities that shaped their upbringing. The loss is relational, cultural, and emotional. It feels like grieving a home that no longer has space for you.

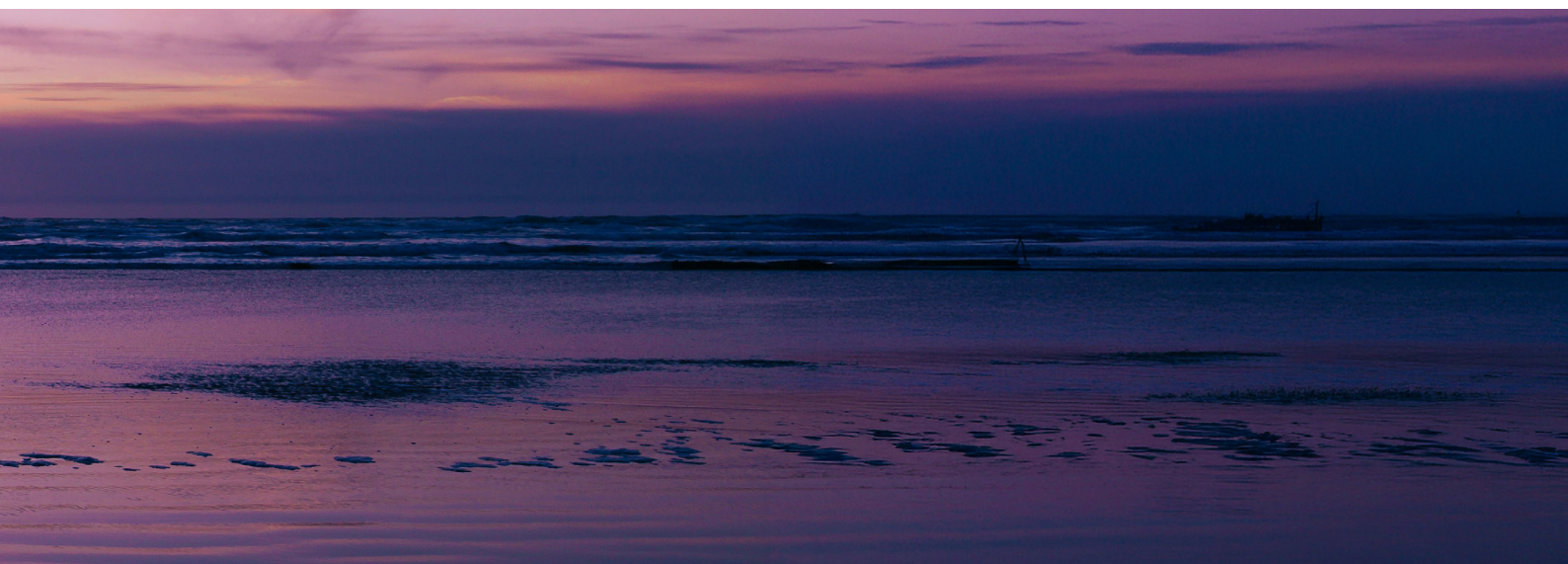
What's important is to recognise that even through loss, spiritual transition is about reintegration.

in a world that suddenly looks so different, living authentically creates a space. It creates the opportunity to discover new forms of meaning — not as replacements, but as evolutions. Some find meaning in nature, in art, in meditation, in chosen family, or in the simple act of living truthfully. Others sometimes return to their original traditions with a changed understanding, finding spaces that are affirming where they would have expected rejection.

Nevertheless, sometimes the belief systems we may have held prior to transition begin to break down or not make sense anymore, but

what you might see, is that spiritual transition isn't something you have to do actively, it's a natural part of becoming more authentically who you are. It encompasses the complexity of living in a world that doesn't always have room for gender diverse folk, as well as the strength and resilience of those who carve out that room anyway.

If you find yourself navigating this fourth arm of transition, remember this: your spiritual journey is valid, whether it leads you deeper into faith, away from it, or toward something entirely new. Your spirit deserves the same attention your body and identity are claiming. Whatever shape it takes, spiritual transition is the part of gender transition where the soul catches up to the body, where the inner self steps forward and says, I'm here too. Don't forget me.



ABOUT THE GENDER CENTRE

The Gender Centre is committed to providing services and activities which enhance the ability of gender diverse people to live their best, most authentic lives. The Gender Centre is also committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of gender diverse people.

We offer a wide range of services to gender diverse people and their partners, TGD families and organisations, as well as service providers. We aim to provide a high quality service which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

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Hannah Dockrill

Photography

All photography is open source or supplied by The Gender Centre

We are a free publication that depends upon community volunteers. Please consider donating to Polare to help us keep up the important work of promoting the voices of TGD people and families.

Donations can be made through the Gender Centre Website: www.gendercentre.org.au

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YOUR STORY OR IDEA COULD BE HERE IN THE NEXT EDITION

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