



THIRRILI

Thirrili Ltd

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CEO Update

Hi Everyone

I have now been in the CEO role for nine weeks and during this time I have been incredibly grateful for the support of the wonderful team at Thirrili.

Each of our team members goes above and beyond on a daily basis, and there is never any doubting their commitment to help alleviate the complexity for our families and communities following a suicide or fatal critical incident.

The team is open and willing to engage in new learning; to share their own experiences and learning; and to ensuring we are able to provide a culturally based postvention service.

I also want to acknowledge the commitment and support of our

amazing Board led by Timothy Goodwin.

The Board have been proactive in coming together to review the organisation priorities and developing their new Strategic Plan for Thirrili.



The most recent event was a Board Strategic Planning Workshop on Saturday 8 August 2020 – this Plan is currently now being finalised with a view to releasing it publicly by the end of August.

The Board have provided critical

leadership and guidance to me as the CEO and I am grateful for their focus on strategy and direction, at the same time as they support me in becoming familiar with the organisation.

A key strategy of the Board is to reinvigorate the pursuit of partnerships with individuals, communities and organisations – including both a National Reference Group, but also a National Reference & Lived Experience Group.

We are incredibly pleased that both Prof Pat Dudgeon and Prof Gracelyn Smallwood will be members of the National Reference Group, and also engage with the Lived Experience Group.

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Please note: these incidents are described as reported to us. The respective Coroner for each jurisdiction will ultimately determine the cause of death in each case. Please note further that not all suspected suicides of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reported to us.

Gender

State or Territory*

	Male	Not known at this time	Female	QLD	WA	NT	VIC	NSW	SA	Total
Completed suicides	50	2	17	20	15	10	12	6	6	69

	17 and younger	18-30 inclusive	Older than 30	Not known at this time	Total
Completed suicides	11	33	21	4	69

**NIPS
Incident
reports
updated
each issue**

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I am also very grateful to the Scholarship Participants who have advised they are keen to be included on the Reference Groups and to continue their association with Thirrili as Ambassadors.

These connections to our Communities across Australia are incredibly important, and the ability to seek their feedback, guidance and oversight of our work ensures we continue to grow our connections to ensure the delivery of quality services and supports.

If you would like to join one of our Reference Groups, please don't hesitate to email me at: Jacqueline.m@thirrili.com.au.

I also want to acknowledge the ongoing commitment and support of the Partners in the Kimberley Postvention Service: the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service and Standby Support After Suicide.

Together the partnership members ensure that the work for postvention support in the Kimberley is collaborative, responsive and meets the needs expressed by Community during the original consultation workshops some years ago.

Anglicare delivers the Standby Support After Suicide Program in the Kimberley and we thank them for their commitment.

Another strategic goal for the Board is to revisit our current partnerships and to identify opportunities for new partnerships – nationally, regionally and locally – to ensure we are able to continue to support families and communities in an holistic way.

We will update you all as we progress in this space. Key components of our partnerships include collaboration to ensure people impacted by suicide have access to the critical supports and services they need in a timely way; workforce development; clinical support; program co-design; and advocacy.

Postvention is Prevention: and we need to advocate to ensure the continued funding support for these programs, and particularly programs that are developed, delivered and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in order to better respond to the cultural complexities associated with trans-generational grief, loss and trauma.

We currently have a range of employment opportunities available – although we are cognisant that because we can only offer employment until 31 December 2020, the response has been extremely limited.

Many people have told us they would love to work at Thirrili but they cannot take the risk of becoming unemployed in January – particularly given the current economic situation due to Covid-19.

Job security is a key fundamental need for all people to flourish

and be able to support their families.

So, can you help us? We are keen to partner with other organisations who may be able to collaborate with us so we can “second” staff to Thirrili to fill the critically important National Indigenous Postvention Advocate roles.

We believe secondments will have benefits not only for Thirrili but also to our partner organisations; the people who participate and, perhaps most importantly it will benefit our families and communities by supporting them through grief, loss and trauma.

Any staff who are seconded will be provided with training on culturally responsive ways of working with families in the postvention space, including our Model of Care. We are also keen that they will be participants of the next Thirrili Scholarship Program, which we hope to commence in mid-October. The staff would then be able to bring this learning and experience back to their “home” organisations.

If your organisation is interested in these opportunities, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Until next time, take care.

Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
Chief Executive Officer



And that's a Wrap: Scholarship Participants “Graduate”

Our First Thirrili Scholarship Program finished on Friday 14 August 2020.

The Scholarship Program was an initiative of the Thirrili Board. The overarching aim was to increase the number of people with skills and experiences and knowledge of how to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders families and communities whose lives have been by suicide and trauma.

The program consisted of on-line learning, activities, workshops, invited guests with expertise, a focus on understanding and engaging with cultural healing, and working with families during difficult times.

This Program has been extremely beneficial for both Thirrili and the Participants. Our CEO Jacqueline met with the Program Participants on Friday morning at a Celebratory (Virtual) Morning Tea, where Participants shared their thoughts about the Program.

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Of particular note was the overwhelming endorsement and praise for the Scholarship Program Leader Tanja Hirvonen. Tanja is a very proud Aboriginal woman and is a registered Clinical Psychologist, passionate about working in evidence based and culturally sound ways to make a difference to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Tanja has a particular interest in suicide prevention and mental health. All Participants of the Program endorsed Tanja's approach, including making the learning space safe – both culturally and spiritually. Tanja has a long association with Thirrili providing clinical supervision and cultural, social and emotional wellbeing support to Thirrili team.

Thank you so much Tanja for all that you do – your contribution is invaluable.

Participants also stated that some of the benefits of the Program included:

- building new professional relationships
- information sharing
- learning and understanding the importance of culture and it's place in the suicide postvention arena; and
- the importance of culturally based service models.

All Participants praised the fact that the Program was Aboriginal led and focused on a trauma informed practice and were excited to have learned more about Thirrili and the critical work of suicide postvention with Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

And perhaps most exciting – the participants have grouped together and will now be Thirrili Ambassadors – the participants were strongly of the view that they can continue contributing to the work of Thirrili as Ambassadors.

They will also become members of the National Reference & Lived Experience Group. Thirrili is honoured and incredibly grateful to all Participants for their engagement in the program and their commitment to the ongoing support of Thirrili and the National Indigenous Postvention Service.

Postvention is suicide prevention

In an article in an earlier edition of this newsletter, we included a 'Q & A' to explain what we mean by postvention and why we base our flagship program (National Indigenous Postvention Service) on postvention.

In this article, we will build on that earlier information and explain why **postvention is suicide prevention**. To do this we will draw upon the knowledge and experience of Ken Norton, Executive Director of NAMI New Hampshire, USA. NAMI is a grassroots organisation working to improve the quality of life

for all by providing support, education and advocacy for people affected by mental illness and suicide, while Ken is a well regarded suicide prevention scholar and practitioner who is a regular at suicide prevention and postvention conferences internationally, including Australia.

He suggests that after the suicide of a loved one, people readily come together to provide comfort and support to family and friends, but they may not realise how many others are affected by that death...or for how long afterward. He argues that Postvention is not only a response to what has happened, but also as protection against and preparation for what could happen.

He adds that Postvention is prevention and that suicide prevention efforts should include a comprehensive postvention component that reduces risk and promotes healing for the immediate family and reaches out into the community to support the broader group of loss survivors including friends, co-workers, first responders, treatment providers, and others exposed to the death.

Norton describes the ultimate in suicide prevention as "a three-legged stool including prevention, intervention, and postvention" and suggests that too often, postvention has been the missing leg.

He uses the metaphor of a pebble dropping into a lake to describe the impacts of a suicide death. "While the first and biggest waves hit the family and those closest to the decedent, the impact spreads outward to others exposed to the death such as friends, witnesses, first responders, treatment providers, and colleagues." He adds that "a suicide death can affect those beyond the immediate loss survivors and ripple outward, impacting others and even an entire community. Although they are rare events, suicide clusters and suicide contagion also provide examples of how exposure to suicide can increase risk."

Postvention is about how a community can come together to keep its members safe. This is where we come in. In a culturally appropriate way, we assist in putting together the necessary support system required for those who have lost loved ones to suicide, to ensure the 'ripples' don't impact further. We provide the soft referrals to the services and programs required and seek to ensure that an agency is in place undertaking a case management role where necessary. Our 'throughcare plan' behoves us to monitor needs and engage at the level required, and as the circumstances require. When we are no longer needed, we withdraw, but maintain a 'watching brief' should circumstances mean we are needed again.

To read a transcript of Ken Norton discussing Postvention as Prevention, click here:

http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/spark-talk/ken_norton_postvention_as_prevention_transcript.pdf



Aboriginal women celebrated at leadership program graduation

The National Indigenous Times reports that 16 women recently graduated from the Yorga Djenna Bidi Women's Leadership Program run by the Western Australian Aboriginal Leadership Institute (WAALI).

The Yorga Djenna Bidi, program, meaning 'women moving forward together' in Noongar, takes Aboriginal women from all stages of their careers on a journey to build their skill levels, confidence and networks.

To read the full story, go to:

<https://nit.com.au/aboriginal-women-celebrated-at-leadership-program-graduation/>



#GettingThroughThisTogether

The National Mental Health Commission (NMHC) announced on 16 August 2020 the creation of #GettingThroughThisTogether – a national conversation to support the mental health and wellbeing of Australians as the uncertainty around COVID-19 continues.

This program follows on from #InThisTogether, launched in response to the pandemic in March, and acknowledges the continuing challenges for many Australians, as we navigate the compounding impacts of the pandemic.

To learn more about this initiative, go to:

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/news/2020/august/gettingthroughthistogether>

Managing anticipatory grief

In a column in the National Indigenous Times (NIT), Kamilaroi woman and Accredited Mental Health Social Worker Kym Marsden writes about what she describes as 'anticipatory grief' in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"Throughout this pandemic, we have all experienced some form of anticipatory grief as the cloud of uncertainty hovers around our futures and what it holds for us, our loved ones and our communities. It's almost like weathering a really bad storm in a small boat where you can see the rising waves and dark clouds looming above you, leaving you feeling vulnerable. As we know, the worst may be yet to come and we are starting to miss life as we once knew it; before our sense of safety was eroded, leaving us feeling disoriented."

To read the complete article as appeared in NIT on 14 August 2020, go to:

<https://nit.com.au/managing-anticipatory-grief/>

Consider Mental Health First Aid Training

Nearly one in five Australian adults experience a common mental illness each year. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, that figure is closer to one in three.

Have you thought about undertaking mental health first Aid Training (MHFA)? Completing an MHFA Course will help you to develop the skills to support a friend, family member or co-worker.

Having mental health first aid skills means that you can assist someone developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis and make a real difference to your community. Perhaps this might be something you could do as part of workplace professional development?

Courses are run weekly, right across the country and can be online, face to face or a mix of the two.

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Importantly, courses are regularly scheduled just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people. Upcoming courses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are scheduled for :

- Dubbo NSW
- Nhulunbuy NT
- Port Macquarie NSW
- Kallangur QLD
- Carnarvon WA
- Nowra NSW
- Glenside SA

For more information go to:

<https://mhfa.com.au>

Please note that Thirili has no commercial or other relationship with MHFA and suggests that prospective students seek their own advice/research different providers before enrolling. We provide this information in the interest of increasing the capacity of communities to assist people in need.



Indigenous Literacy Day

It's Indigenous Literacy Day on 2 September 2020. The annual event—organised by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation—celebrates Indigenous culture, stories, language and literacy. Usually a live event celebrates the occasion but this year, the celebrations will be virtual.

For more information, go to:

<https://www.indigenoussliteracyfoundation.org.au/indigenous-literacy-day>



Well worth a read

Sticking with the literary theme, here are some recent award winning books by Aboriginal and Torres Strait authors:

The White Girl by Tony Birch

This book won the Indigenous Writer's Prize for the 2020 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. The judges' comments include the following:

"An outstanding work by a master of the craft, The White Girl resonates strongly in the present despite being set in the past. Birch has drawn one of the most memorable and charming characters in Australian literature in the staunch person of Odette, who is compelled by an abiding sense of justice and a steely determination to protect her granddaughter at all costs".

"While not attempting to tell the broader national story of child removal policies and the stolen generations, The White Girl is a close examination of the power of the state and bureaucracies to alter the course of individual lives".

See further commentary and information about *The White Girl* here:

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/awards/indigenous-writers-prize/2020-winner-white-girl-tony-birch>

Alfred's War by Rachel Bin Salleh and Samantha Fry

Shortlisted for the Indigenous Writer's Prize for the 2020 NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

Said the Judge's of this shortlisted children's book:

"The story told so gently and evocatively in Alfred's War is one of national significance – the unacknowledged military service of Aboriginal men in the First World War. Despite the subject, the first-time writer handles the content deftly – evoking the bitter peacetime experience of many returned black soldiers".

See further commentary and information about *Alfred's War* here:

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/awards/indigenous-writers-prize/2020-shortlisted-alfreds-war-rachel-bin-salleh-and-samantha-fry>

Too much lip by Melissa Lucashenko

Shortlisted for the Indigenous Writer's Prize for the 2020 NSW Premier's Literary Awards and winner of the 2019 Miles Franklin Literary Award.

Said the judges of this novel:

"Too Much Lip is laced with salty blak humour that just cannot be faked. This novel reckons with the ghosts of the past in a way few have, confronting them head-on in an unflinchingly honest story of survival, inherited legacies and the concurrence of past and present".

See further commentary and information about *Too Much Lip* here:

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/awards/indigenous-writers-prize/2020-shortlisted-too-much-lip-melissa-lucashenko>

COVID-19 information updated

COVID-19 is proving to be a difficult threat to get under control. In Victoria, the numbers of cases reported each day since the 'second wave' has come down from a high of over 700 to 279 in 24 hours to 17 August 2020. Sadly, 16 people have died from the disease in that 24 hour period .

In New South Wales, only 5 cases were reported in the 24 hr period to 17 August 2020 and 1 only in South Australia. As our Kiwi cousins can attest, just when you think you have it beaten, it comes back. They were 100 days without a new case and now have 78 active cases after 9 new cases in the 24 hour period to 17 August 2020. We must all remain vigilant.

Take care of yourselves and your loved ones by following the advice of the NIAA and Commonwealth, State and Territory health experts. Links to each jurisdiction are below:

- [NIAA](#)
- [ACT](#)
- [Commonwealth](#)
- [NSW](#)
- [NT](#)
- [QLD](#)
- [SA](#)
- [TAS](#)
- [VIC](#)
- [WA](#)

For tips for staying healthy and strong during the coronavirus outbreak, visit our friends at Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia. Go to:

<https://www.gayaadhuwi.org.au/files/gaaya-dhuwi-coronavirus-long.pdf>



Crisis contact numbers

- | | |
|---|--|
| ⇒ Thirrili After Suicide support 1800 805 807 | ⇒ Kids Help Line: 1800 551 800 |
| ⇒ Lifeline: 13 11 14 | ⇒ MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 78 |
| ⇒ Suicide call back service: 1300 659 467 | ⇒ Beyond Blue: 1300 845 745 |
| ⇒ Coronavirus mental health support line 1800 512 348 | ⇒ GriefLine: 1300 845 745 (midday to 3am AEST 7 days a week) |

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