



Welcome speech: Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP – Parliament of Australia

Speech by Lee Joachim, CEO, Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative

Date delivered: 9 June 2017

In the spirit of respect, I welcome you Minister Wyatt and the Honourable Damian Drum to Rumbalara, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered and recognise all tribes of the Yorta Yorta nation. I also pay my respects to all elders past and present, to your elders, my elders and people from all cultures gathered here today.

There has been a lot of talk about Recognition and Treaty and Self Determination. Sometimes this talk can fool people into thinking that not much else is happening. As we speak today, a tsunami of Government Reforms looms over us. Currently we are working to prepare ourselves for reforms that impact our funding base, our regulatory environment and the number and type of competitors we have to deal with. Reforms include:

- Implementation of the **National Disability Insurance Scheme**
- How **Aged Care Packages** are delivered
- **Juvenile Justice** reforms and the transition from DHHS to Department of Justice
- **Out of Home Care and Child Protection Reforms** which will see organisations such as Rumbalara take on responsibility for Aboriginal Children in out of home care
- A General Movement from Block Funding to **Market Based, Competitive Funding Models** which pose a significant risk for our organisation
- There is a General **Mainstreaming of Indigenous Services**
- We have to ensure that we are able to effectively Respond to the **Royal Commission into Domestic and Family Violence**
- We continue to ensure that we are effectively responding to **Closing the Gap**.

This year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the **1967 Referendum** that saw us recognised as human beings. Thirty years ago the **1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody** was held but recently we have witnessed the tragic increase in suicide in Indigenous communities including people committing suicide in

holding cells and in prisons. We celebrate the 25th anniversary of the **Mabo Decision** that recognised our system of laws and our ownership and connection to country. We also commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the 1997 **Bringing them Home** Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families which has resulted in intergenerational trauma and disempowerment on a scale which continues to impact our daily lives and will do for many years, and many generations to come unless something effective is done.

While the root cause of the challenges facing Aboriginal families today can be traced back to the structural manifestation of racist colonialism the negative impacts are experienced in multiple complex systemic and personal ways.

Poverty, poor educational and economic participation leading to sub-standard outcomes, generational unemployment, ill-health, high rates of child mortality, high rates of incarceration, high rates of children being removed from their families, high rates of alcohol and substance abuse, high rates of suicide and mental illness and deaths from preventable diseases are all examples of the experience of an Aboriginal person today.

This shopping list of disadvantage is familiar to all people but it is misleading in its' simplicity. It is tempting to fall into the trap of thinking that by addressing each of these symptoms, we will have addressed the cause. These experiences have impacted many generations over more than 200 years and have a cumulative and compounding impact.

Anger, Resentment, Suspicion, Aggression, Apathy, Hopelessness, Helplessness, Isolation, Impulsiveness and Disconnection are experiences that all Aboriginal people will recognise. This can be manifest in ways such as:

- upsetting memories, flashbacks or dreams;
- feeling physically and psychologically distressed, sometimes without obvious cause;
- had trouble remembering important events from the past;
- had very negative beliefs about yourself, others or the world;
- persistently blaming or being highly critical of yourself or others;
- persistently felt negative, angry, guilty or ashamed;
- feeling cut off from others; or
- engaging in reckless or self-destructive behaviour

These familiar behaviours and experiences are actually all symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The personal experiences and impacts over generations has meant that we are less likely to be able to navigate the complex systems that have been set up by Governments and service delivery organisations.

It has meant that we are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse and that a sometimes vicious cycle of victimization plays out in our communities.

We are less likely to be able to form coalitions and work cooperatively to achieve outcomes that will benefit our communities, and we are more likely to compete with each other and perpetuate historical feuds and resentments. Forgiveness does not come easy in our communities.

At Rumba we are committed to working together with the other organisations and service deliverers, we are committed to bringing together the families and the clans and we are committed to bringing together all the people into the Heart of our Community.

We have formed the **Rumbalara Elders Advisory Council** who are made up of all representatives of community, Bangarang and Yorta Yorta.

We have formed the **Emerging Leaders Group** who represent a generation across community who are committed to ending intergenerational trauma and leading by example.

We have established the **Empowered Women Children and Families** to support women to be less vulnerable and make strong decisions on behalf of themselves and their children and families.

We have committed ourselves to ensure that every member of our community experiences CONNECTION, OPTIMISM and a sense of EMPOWERMENT and not the ISOLATION, HELPLESSNESS & HOPELESSNESS of the past.

We are taking a deliberate strategy of being PROACTIVE, welcoming ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPERANCY and recognizing our own STRENGTHS and WEAKNESSES.

We want to form positive working relationships with Government and we want you to join us as we strive for our own futures and the futures of our grandchildren in the spirit of respect, cooperation, empowerment and self-determination.