

2013 Reconciliation Week event

Lakemba Library

Thursday 30 May 2013

Opening Statement

We have gathered here to celebrate 2013 Reconciliation Week and to acknowledge the heritage and culture of the Traditional Owners and Custodians of our land, the Aboriginal people.

The theme of Reconciliation Week this year is "Let's talk Reconciliation" and the NSW Reconciliation Council website states that:

"Reconciliation is about recognising the truth of Australia's history, and moving forward together with a commitment to social justice, and building relationships based on mutual understanding, respect and trust"

The same website also states:

"Reconciliation is about addressing the divisions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, divisions that have been caused by a lack of respect, knowledge and understanding."

Therefore, a big part of achieving reconciliation involves raising awareness and knowledge of history and culture of the First People of Australia.

This was the aim of the project instigated by the Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory Group which we are launching today.

About the project

Named by the participants themselves, the project was called "Our Reconciliation Story" and it brought together 14 people of diverse cultures and Aboriginal residents to share their stories, and learn about the heritage of the First People of Australia through art.

Jointly, they've created a banner which reflects the deep connection of the Aboriginal people with the land and nature, and incorporating some symbols of the different tribes that they came from.

This project has provided an excellent opportunity for non-Aboriginal residents who came from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, Indonesia, Lebanon and Poland to learn more about Aboriginal Australians and the ties they have directly to our community and the land.

The project has demonstrated that our City is home to Aboriginal people who can trace their heritage from a number of different Aboriginal countries, as well as people who come from just about every country in the world.

They are part of our rich fabric of cultures and contribute their unique spiritual heritage to our community life.

Through this project also, some Aboriginal residents were able to create Aboriginal art for the first time which has enabled them to reconnect with their traditional Aboriginal culture and heritage.

This community arts initiative was funded by the City of Canterbury.

We will be very proud to have this unique and locally created Reconciliation banner displayed in our library branches progressively over the coming months and at future events of our Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory Group and Council.

I encourage you to read the banner description on display to uncover the messages and symbols behind the design keeping in mind that it was created by ordinary people like you and me in the spirit of reconciliation.

About Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory Group

The Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory Group has been working with Council since the 2006 to inform our community about our rich Aboriginal heritage and culture.

They have conducted many successful initiatives such as NAIDOC Week events, Family Days, Aboriginal movie screenings, Reconciliation Walks and most importantly, a school based Aboriginal awareness program delivered by group members themselves.

As part of this capacity development activity they have visited local primary schools, pre-schools and vacation centres to deliver art workshops, Acknowledgments of Country at various school functions, Aboriginal story-telling and Indigenous games as well as bush walks along the Cooks River and Cup and Saucer Creek.

The River Walks, as we call them, have been a particularly good way of exploring the local natural and built environments and discussing the culture and the special relationship Aboriginal people have with the land.

Local schools have been most impressed with this Aboriginal awareness program and appreciative of the voluntary efforts of the members of Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory Group.

We believe that "Our Reconciliation Story" project is yet another example of an excellent idea of the Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory Group and a great opportunity to reflect on achievements to date as well as work which has yet to be done to achieve full reconciliation and to better care for our country.

Finally, I have been asked to encourage our Aboriginal residents to join the ranks of our Canterbury Aboriginal Advisory Group and to speak to us about their concerns because if we don't know there is a problem we can't be part of the solution.

I hope that the children have enjoyed today's workshop in Aboriginal culture and I congratulate all project participants for the work well done on the banner and the project as a whole.

I'd like to thank you all for coming.