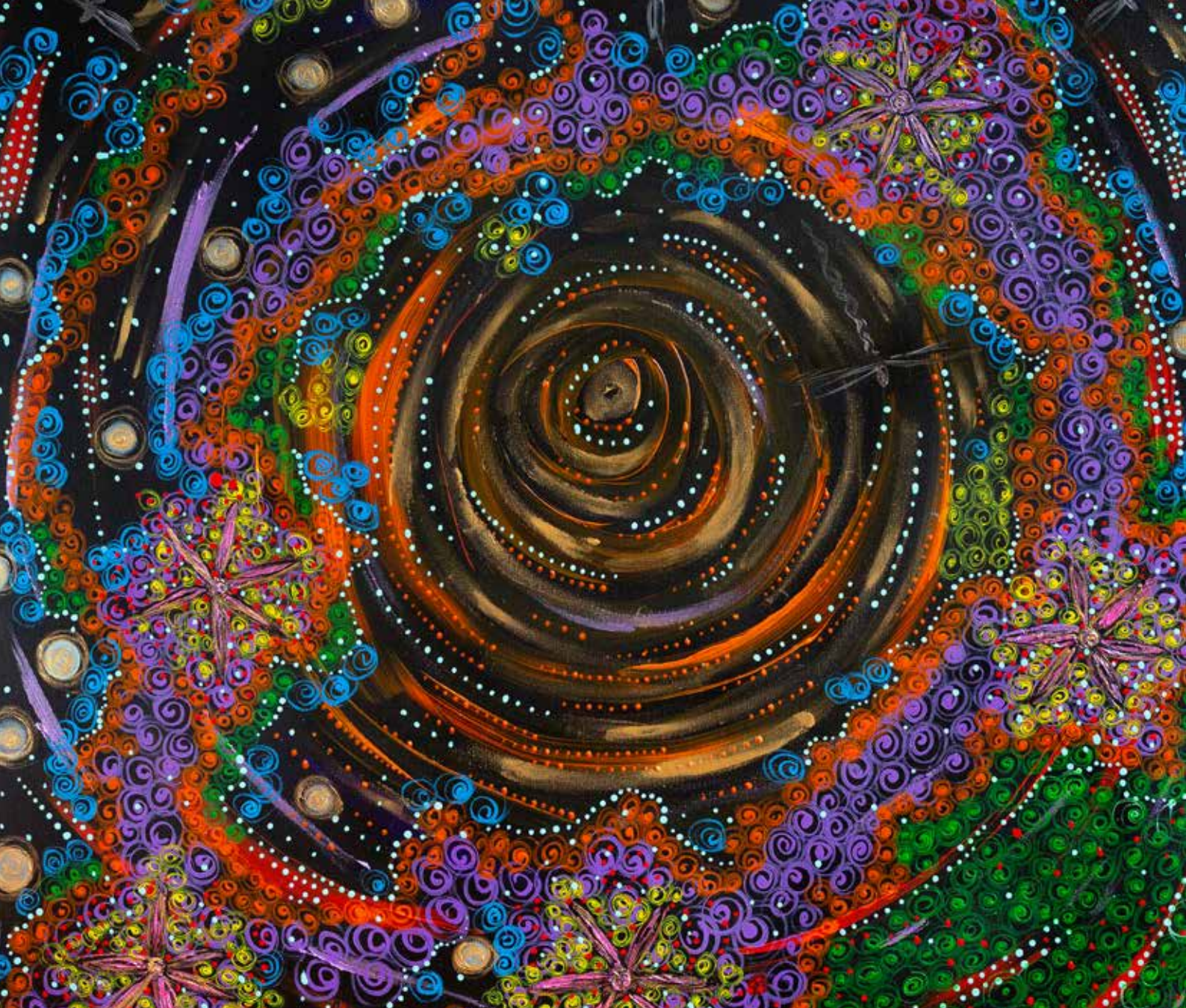




Report by Antoinette Braybrook AM, Djirra CEO, Churchill Fellow

2023 Churchill Fellowship to study organisations to inform
the establishment of a business model for Djirra's expansion.
Awarded by The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.



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Djirra is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation with over 20 years' experience finding solutions through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women sharing their stories, journeys, and experiences. Djirra celebrates women's strength and resilience and is committed to a future without family violence. Self-determination is the foundation of everything Djirra does. Djirra delivers holistic, culturally safe, specialist family violence support, legal, case management, and wellbeing services and programs across Victoria. Djirra advocates for system-wide change to improve access to justice, eliminate systemic violence, and strengthen women's resilience.



Preface

Indemnity clause

I understand that the Churchill Trust may publish this Report, either in hard copy or on the internet or both, and consent to such publication.

I indemnify the Churchill Trust against any loss, costs or damages it may suffer arising out of any claim or proceedings made against the Trust in respect of or arising out of the publication of any Report submitted to the Trust and which the Trust places on the website for access over the internet.

I also warrant that my Final Report is original and does not infringe the copyright of any person, or contain anything which is, or the incorporation of which into the Final Report is, actionable for defamation, a breach of privacy law or obligation, breach of confidence, contempt of court, passing-off or contravention of any private right or of any law.

Signed: 

Date: 20th November 2024





Acknowledgements

I acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the lands I am fortunate to live and work on. I acknowledge the enduring strength, wisdom and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, my Elders and clans whose survival extends beyond 60,000 years on this land.

I give heartfelt thanks to all the individuals and agencies I visited through the Churchill Fellowship, not only for making time and sharing their insights, but for the warmth of their welcomes.

I thank Djirra's Board and staff, present and past, who have worked tirelessly to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children and helped make my participation in this journey possible.

I am deeply grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for its financial and practical support for this journey, and for such a precious opportunity to meet with First Nations sisters and peers.

And finally, in cultural terms, I also acknowledge the traditional owners of all the lands and waters on which I travelled, and upon which I endeavoured to tread softly, pay respects and absorb what I could of the histories and the beauties wherever my feet touched.

Introduction

After 250 years of structured violence, cultural oppression, and attempted genocide, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (hereafter Aboriginal women) rightfully deserve a self-determined place for keeping safe, strong, connected, visible and heard. As CEO of Djirra, I have used this Fellowship as an opportunity to test and develop my vision for an Aboriginal Women's Centre in Victoria. After years of experience, I have a deep understanding of policy settings and the services available to Aboriginal women across this country that address devastating rates of family violence and other impacts of colonisation. This study of overseas service models has broadened my lens, allowed me to learn from First Nations people in other settler colonial states, and will optimise Djirra's capacity to meet the urgent need for more culturally safe services while continuing to challenge systemic, racist policies and practices.

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<https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/antoinette-braybrook-vic-2023/>

Key terms and abbreviations

First Nations

When used globally, *First Nations* generally refers to the Indigenous peoples of a region who lived on the land before colonisation. While the term originated in Turtle Island Canada to describe Indigenous peoples who are neither Inuit nor Métis, its broader use can apply to other Indigenous groups worldwide. Each region tends to use its own specific terms, so First Nations cannot be universally applied, but it is increasingly recognised in international discussions on Indigenous rights and sovereignty. I have used the term for pragmatic reasons, to emphasise the sovereign status, cultural heritage, and traditional rights of Indigenous peoples as a collective, and because in the Australian cultural context the term *Indigenous* is often seen as a government term. I note that some of the organisations I visited also support Inuit and Métis, and there may be other Indigenous people/s who do not identify as First Nations. I note also that all these terms are a result of colonisation, and that we remain distinct peoples with our own histories and cultures.

Aboriginal

The term *Aboriginal* refers to the Indigenous peoples of mainland Australia and Tasmania, while Torres Strait Islander refers to the Indigenous peoples from the Torres Strait Islands, located between Queensland and Papua New Guinea. Djirra is in Victoria and works primarily but not exclusively with Aboriginal women. We define our use of the term inclusively to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Healing

I am informed by cultural models of Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) in Australia¹, in which wellbeing cannot be separated from cultural continuity and connection to land, language, and community. The SEWB model acknowledges that factors such as colonisation, dispossession, and cultural genocide have deeply impacted our communities, resulting in historical and intergenerational trauma, social disadvantage, and loss of cultural identity. Healing through SEWB involves restoring these connections and addressing the broader social, cultural, and historical determinants of health. It is understood as an ongoing, transformative process that requires time, cultural engagement, and support at multiple levels, focusing on both individual and community recovery.

Holistic

In the context of not-for-profit services, *holistic* refers to an approach that considers the whole person or community, addressing multiple interconnected aspects of wellbeing rather than focusing on just one issue or area of need. A holistic approach in not-for-profit services means recognising that individuals' needs – whether they are social, emotional, physical, cultural, or spiritual – are interrelated and cannot be effectively addressed in isolation. My use of the term also encapsulates SEWB understandings of holistic approaches, in which wellbeing encompasses not only physical and mental health but also spiritual, cultural, and communal aspects of life, reflecting First Nations worldviews.





Women

This term is defined inclusively to encompass all individuals who may be affected by issues typically associated with women, including cisgender women, transgender women, transgender men, and non-binary or genderqueer individuals. This inclusive approach aims to recognise and respect the diverse experiences and identities relating to gender within the broader community and acknowledges the oppressive impacts of gender through settler colonialism.

Country

When Aboriginal people talk about traditional *Country*, we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. We might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map. For us, *Country* is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While First Nations peoples may no longer necessarily be the titleholders to land, we are still connected to the *Country* of our ancestors and most consider ourselves the custodians or caretakers of our land.

The complexity of naming conventions for *Country* applies across the world. I have used *Aotearoa* for many years when referring to the land to the east of our nation which was colonised by the British and named New Zealand. The term *Turtle Island* in reference to Canada and USA, as the entirety of the land mass known as North America, was new to me but as I travelled, I respectfully engaged with the cultural meaning of Turtle Island as presented to me in the many new settings I was privileged to visit.

NOTES

1 See for example Gee G, Dudgeon P, Schultz C, Hart A & Kelly K (2014) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing*. In: Dudgeon P, Milroy H & Walker R (eds). *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*. 2nd edn. Canberra: Australian Government, pp. 55-68.

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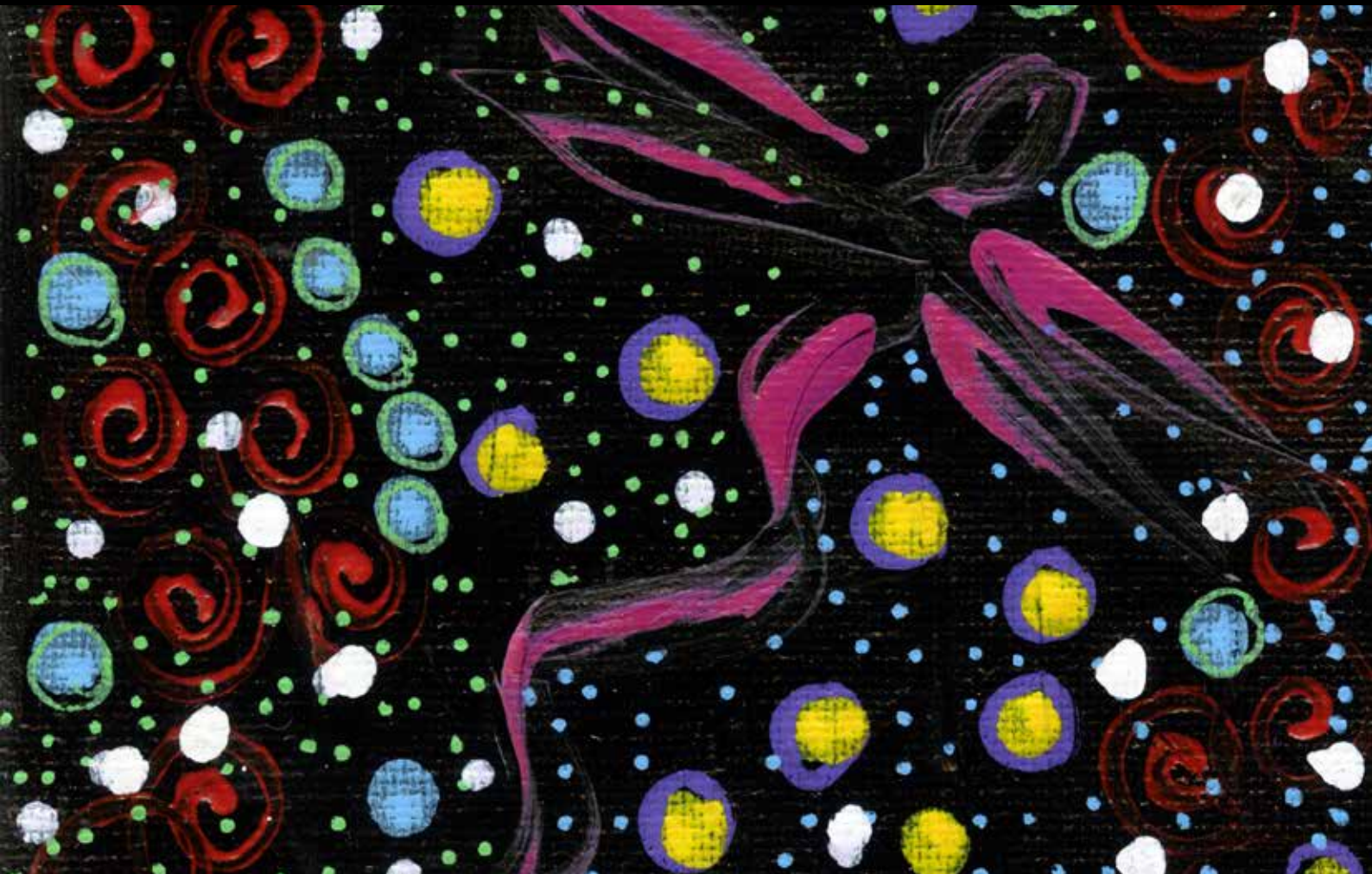




Antoinette Braybrook AM with Djirra staff at NAIDOC Week Launch of Djirra in the West, Melton, July 2023.

Executive summary

Report by Antoinette Braybrook AM, CEO Djirra
2023 Churchill Fellowship to study organisations
to inform the establishment of a business model
for Djirra's future expansion



Glittering Facade. The bright, vibrant lights of New York conceal the harsh realities of poverty and homelessness. Yet Dragonfly passes through, undistracted, not blinded by the glittering facade. © Antoinette Braybrook AM



The Churchill Fellowship landed at the perfect time in the history and progress of Djirra, the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation I have led since its inception in 2002. Djirra's vision, from the very beginning, has always included the establishment of an Aboriginal Women's Centre to serve as a home for its growing, unique, holistic services that not only save, but transform, lives.

For over two decades Djirra has proven that our impact is life-changing. We have reached our current position through sheer hard work and determination, and our success is a testament to the deep trust Aboriginal women place in us. But the need remains enormous in the face of continuing systemic and gendered violence, racism, unpredictable funding, numerous inquiry recommendations ignored by governments, a failed Voice to Parliament Referendum and an ongoing national lack of leadership, investment and direction for change.

Violence against Aboriginal women has reached epidemic levels in this country. Nationally, Aboriginal women are 34² times more likely to be hospitalised for a violent assault, 10³ times more likely to die from a violent assault, and seven⁴ times more likely to be murdered than other women. In 2023 alone, there was an alarming 28%⁵ increase in the rate of femicides in this country, which disproportionately impacted Aboriginal women. Djirra has seen this reflected in our work, with demand rising 33% in 2023 as a result of both heightened awareness and increased need. Devastatingly, this crisis has continued into 2024, with the rates of Aboriginal women killed due to family violence surpassing 2023 before the year ended.⁶

All Aboriginal women in Victoria must have access to Djirra's services for their safety. Upon its establishment, Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre will be the visible manifestation of our work – a catalyst for change. The aim of this report is to give meaning to the invaluable information I gained from meeting a broad range of people and visiting an amazing array of organisations across Turtle Island Canada, Turtle Island U.S., including Hawai'i, and Aotearoa New Zealand to inform our business model for Djirra's future growth and expansion. The composite impact of these interactions will inform – and contribute to – the establishment of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, the first in Victoria. Our Centre will be a major milestone in Djirra's service expansion, cultural presence and advocacy across the state – and indeed the nation – at a time when women's safety is very high on the political and media agenda. Djirra's priority has always been, and will continue to be, to elevate the visibility and self-determination of Aboriginal women.

Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre will not only be a home for our holistic and life-saving services. It will also be a new physical and cultural landmark, a blueprint for the nation, and a place where Aboriginal women can gather, share, restore, and thrive. Our Centre will be underpinned by self-determination, a place of cultural affirmation where Aboriginal women's knowledge, creativity, and entrepreneurial acumen will be showcased and celebrated.

What follows is the story of my journey, through my eyes, as a First Nations woman engaging and connecting with new people from other parts of the world, their stories, and wisdom. This opportunity has allowed me to make connections that I believe will last a lifetime, in places and with people and organisations I could never have imagined possible. My Fellowship allowed me to observe ways that other First Nations peoples have translated cultural wisdoms

and practices into physical buildings and spaces to promote collective identity and healing. It has re-affirmed the importance of centring culture in our work, including visually and spatially, and through Djirra's methods of operation.

The time for Djirra to progress this project, our long-standing vision, is now. Djirra will create a tangible, bricks and mortar home where we as Aboriginal women are seen, heard, and respected, and where our experiences, solutions and self-determination continue to be central to dismantling systems of violence and injustice. Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre will be large enough for our vision to leave an ongoing legacy for future generations.

Key findings and highlights

Creation of culturally resonant healing spaces: The visual and spatial elements of culture I observed in some of the cultural and healing centres have profoundly influenced my plans for the design of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre. These elements were crucial in creating culturally resonant healing spaces that not only serve practical needs but also embody and honour cultural heritage. The arrangement of space, the use of culturally significant symbols, and the overall visual identity of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre will play a vital role in creating a sense of connection, safety, and cultural continuity.

Informed capital expansion: Observations from capital expansion projects have highlighted effective processes and funding strategies that can guide the successful growth and development of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

Innovative and holistic service approaches: The exploration of innovative and holistic service models, including integrated courts and economic empowerment programs, can strengthen Djirra's approach to justice and community support, and underscore the importance of collaboration and partnerships.

Strengthened connections and powerful voices: Engaging in discussions and cultural activities with First Nations women and other advocates has provided insights into shared experiences and cultural values, and new strategies for our advocacy.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - Joint funding for the establishment and ongoing operational costs of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

That all levels of government, Commonwealth, State and Local, commit to funding the establishment and ongoing operational costs of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, in partnership with philanthropists and other funders. Securing diverse funding sources is essential for reducing the risks associated with short-term funding cycles and guaranteeing the Centre's sustainability as a vital, culturally safe space for Aboriginal women.

Recommendation 2 - Funding must allow the development of strong cultural components.

That this funding fully supports the integration of strong cultural components within Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, including involvement of Elders, the incorporation of traditional knowledge and spatial/visual elements, and the use of specialist design and consultation processes that reflect our cultural values and heritage.





Recommendation 3 – Support for Djirra’s Aboriginal Women’s Centre in Victoria’s Statewide Treaty Negotiations.

That the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria, as part of the Victorian Statewide Treaty Negotiations, support and advocate for the establishment of Djirra’s Aboriginal Women’s Centre as a significant cultural landmark that holds space for Aboriginal women’s voices and aspirations, and extends the facilities needed for Aboriginal women experiencing, or at risk of, family and sexual violence in Victoria.

Recommendation 4 – Explore options for expanding services and programs in the development of Djirra’s Aboriginal Women’s Centre.

That Djirra integrates best practice insights gained from the Churchill Fellowship in relation to service and program expansion, partnerships, and diverse funding models. This includes exploring a self-determined social enterprise model, economic empowerment programs and co-location with other relevant organisations.

Recommendation 5 – That Djirra continues to refine our integrated service delivery model to ensure Aboriginal women’s rights are protected and preserved.

That Djirra draws on learnings from the Churchill Fellowship when developing our new integrated service delivery model. This will ensure Aboriginal women experience a more streamlined journey through Djirra, whilst also empowering them to make informed choices and protecting their right to confidentiality.

Recommendation 6 – Expand Djirra’s opportunities for advocacy and collaboration.

That Djirra explores opportunities to strengthen advocacy efforts both nationally and internationally, develop new collaborations, and build partnerships that align with Djirra’s vision for the Aboriginal Women’s Centre.

Next steps

To realise Djirra’s vision, this report will be shared with relevant stakeholders including Commonwealth and State Government Ministers, local government representatives, as well as philanthropists, donors and potential supporters. I will ensure that the report is also shared with the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria and Treaty working groups, Traditional Owner groups, Aboriginal forums and community-controlled organisation sector partners.

Most importantly, the insights and information gained throughout my tour will inform the Feasibility Study, Capital Fundraising and Partnership Strategy and, later, Business Case for Djirra’s Aboriginal Women’s Centre. To ensure we reach our funding goals, Djirra has engaged capital fundraisers, held a number of initial meetings with governments and philanthropists, developed a Prospectus document and engaged consultants to undertake a Feasibility Study.

I invite potential funders (across all sectors), political and other advocates, as well as government agencies, peak bodies, and other service providers to join Djirra on our incredible journey to establish Victoria’s first Aboriginal Women’s Centre.

NOTES

2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (25 September 2024), 'Family, domestic and sexual violence – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People'. Published online at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

3 Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice (May 2024), *Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission Inquiry on Justice Responses to Sexual Violence*.

4 Bricknell S & Miles H 2024. *Homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*. Statistical Bulletin no. 46. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Published online at <https://doi.org/10.52922/sb77604>

5 Australian Institute of Criminology (30 April 2024), 'Australia sees a rise in female intimate partner homicide in new research report', *Homicide in Australia 2022–23*. Published online at <https://www.aic.gov.au/media-centre/news/australia-sees-rise-female-intimate-partner-homicide-new-research-report>.

6 As of November 2024, at least 10 Aboriginal women have been killed across Australia as a result of family violence. 8 of these women were killed in the Northern Territory between June and November 2024 (SBS, 19 November 2024). Published online at <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/eight-aboriginal-women-have-died-due-to-domestic-violence-in-the-nt-since-june/1ed1k1kbe>



Djirra staff at NAIDOC Week launch of Djirra in the West, Melton, July 2023.



Kelly Faldon, Taungurung woman, Manager, Community Community Engagement, Djirra, with Antoinette, Aotearoa New Zealand, September 2024.

Itinerary



Making Sense. This painting explores how we make sense of everything we see and hear. It reflects my journey across mountains and oceans, connecting me with people from every corner of the world. The larger circles symbolise gathering places where stories and experiences are exchanged and carried forward to share and inspire what is yet to come. © Antoinette Braybrook AM

2024 - Turtle Island Canada

Date	Location	Organisation	Attendees
24 July	Quebec	Department of Indigenous Services	- Catherine Lappe Assistant Deputy Minister for Indigenous Services Canada - Molly McGrowder Chief of Staff
25 July	Ottawa	Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health	Allison Fisher Executive Director
30 July	Ottawa	Minwaashin Lodge Indigenous Women's Support Centre	Mary Daoust Executive Director and Co-Chair Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition
1 August	Quebec	Native Women's Association of Canada	Carol McBride President

2024 - Turtle Island U.S.

Date	Location	Organisation	Attendees
6 August	New York	Sanctuary for Families	- Judge Judy Kluger CEO - Simone Monasebian Chief Program Officer
6 August	New York	Urban Resource Institute	Nathaniel M. Fields CEO
7-8 August	New York	Center for Justice Innovation Integrated Domestic Violence Court Midtown Community Justice Center (MCJC)	- Rebecca Thomforde Hauser Associate Director Domestic Violence Programs - Lindsey Price Jackson Associate Director MCJC - Jordan Otis Deputy Director MCJC
12 August	Montana	YWCA Billings	Visit to campus only
15 August	Montana	Blackfeet Indian Reservation Domestic Violence Unit	CEO, staff and tribal members

2024 - Hawai'i

Date	Location	Organisation	Attendees
22 August	Honolulu	Women's Fund of Hawai'i	Karen Mukai Board Chair
27 August	Honolulu	Hawai'i State Coalition against Domestic Violence	Vanessa Corwin Program Director
27 August	Kalihi	Ho'oulu 'Āina Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services	Puni Jackson Program Director
29 August	Waianae	Native Hawaiian Traditional Healing Center, Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center (WCCHC)	Rich Bettini President and CEO WCCHC

2024 - Aotearoa New Zealand

Date	Location	Organisation	Attendees
1 September	Mt Eden Auckland	World Federation of Public Health Associations Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand	- Emma Rawson Te Patu President - Adrian Te Patu Board Member
3 September	Auckland	Eastern Refuge Society	Anna Atkinson Community Engagement Lead and Privacy Officer
6 September	Hastings	Heretaunga Women's Centre	- Gwen John Co-Chair - Deidre Venter Manager
10 September	Christchurch	He Waka Tapu Ltd Kaupapa Māori health and social services	Jackie Burrows CEO
11 September	Christchurch	Ngā Hau e Whā National Marae	Henare Edwards Kaumatua (Elder) and Chairman of Te Rūnanga o Ngā Maata Waka, the Guardians of the Marae
12 September	Christchurch	National Public Health Service	Tanya McCall Group Manager Strategy and Operations

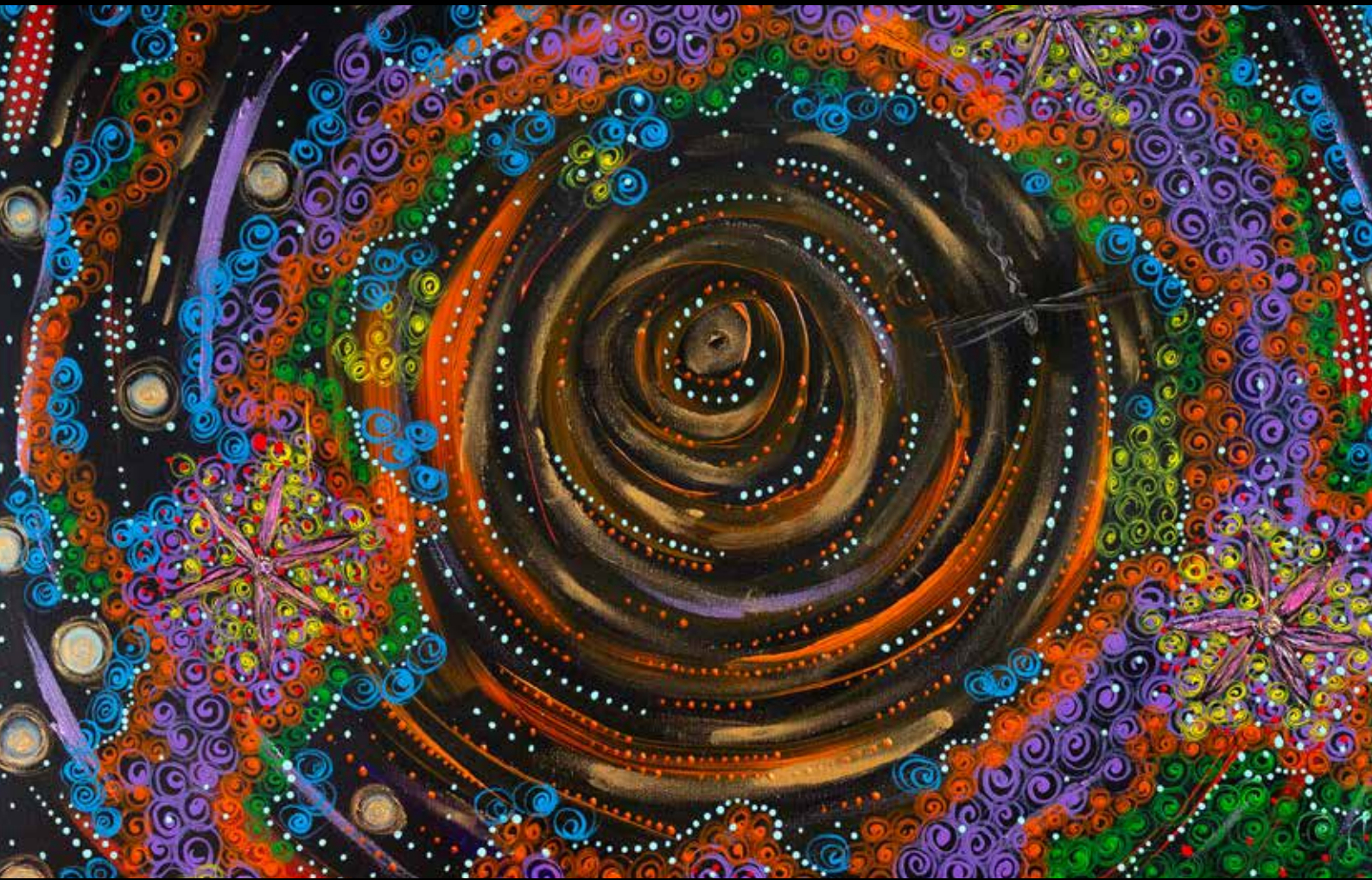
NOTE: There were some changes from my initial schedule, and some important agencies I was disappointed to miss. My schedule was full, across distances, and there was little room for flexibility when finding times to meet. It is a reflection too of how busy my counterparts are, and how much pressure there is on our organisational leaders – especially when accompanied by our obligations as members of First Nations families and communities. I was however able to secure some new meetings – with the help of chance and some cold calling – through which I gained some unexpected and significant insights and connections.





Djirra's 16 Days of ACTIVEism Walk around Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra, November 2024.

My Djirra journey: connection and community



Dragonfly Dreaming – My Journey – Wild Wreath Flowers from the Sky.
Inspired by photos a friend once showed me many years ago when they
visited the wild wreath flowers in Western Australia, Dragonfly dances
enjoying the colour of the night. © Antoinette Braybrook AM

I am Antoinette Braybrook AM, an Aboriginal woman, born and have lived all my life on Wurundjeri country in Victoria. My grandfather and mother's line is through the Kuku Yalanji, far north Queensland. I have been the CEO of Djirra since its inception in 2002, and I have dedicated my life to advocating for the rights of Aboriginal women and their children.

I started my Fellowship journey in Turtle Island Canada. I had some incredible weeks meeting and connecting with truly inspirational people, especially women leaders. I saw, heard, and felt diverse ways of life as I travelled across Turtle Island U.S., visiting New York, Montana and Los Angeles. My final stops were in the Pacific Ocean, first in Hawai'i and then Aotearoa New Zealand. These meetings and conversations have allowed me to explore issues and solutions related to gendered violence, First Nations self-determination, and human rights. But my journey started long before this amazing opportunity and forms a small but important part of a collective story. Let me take you back to the beginning of Djirra's story and our long-standing vision to establish Victoria's first Aboriginal Women's Centre.



Djirra's Sisters Day Out® workshop, Broadford, October 2024.



Storytelling, NAIDOC Week Family Day, July 2024.



Koori Women's Place Possum Skin Cloak showing women's handprints made to celebrate its 500th workshop, July 2024.

My journey to Djirra started long before Djirra itself became a reality. As I reflect on our family's story of survival – despite the injustices inflicted on the generations before and my immediate family's experiences of racism – the path leading me to Djirra was already paved. I have grown with Djirra, since the organisation's inception in 2002. We started small but determined, and with a big vision to amplify Aboriginal women's voices and experiences to draw attention to the devastating impacts of colonisation – and prioritise the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal women and children in the face of increasingly high rates of family violence, child removal, incarceration, homelessness and other impacts and legacies of our history since colonisation to the present day.

Violence against Aboriginal women in this country is a national crisis and a national shame. In my 22 years as the CEO of Djirra, I have only ever seen the rates of violence rise.⁷ From day one, the demand for Djirra's frontline services was immense and funding was slow and not prioritised. We knew that Aboriginal women were, and still are, disproportionately affected by family violence, facing unique challenges stemming from the intersection of gender-based violence and the long-standing impacts of colonisation. We knew that we had to be more than a legal service – and we had to do more than just frontline work. Over time, we set our sights on expanding to include our signature early intervention prevention programs Sisters Day Out®, Young Luv® and Dilly Bag – that take us to our women, draw on cultural strengths



Djirra cupcakes to celebrate Djirra's 22nd birthday, October 2024.



Learning to dance, Djirra's NAIDOC Week Family Day, July 2024.



Young Luv® workshop, October 2024.



Donations ready to be packed into Christmas Hampers, Koori Women's Place, December 2024.



to increase resilience and build trust and confidence in what we do – and other non-legal supports through intensive support services and counselling. With Djirra's Koori Women's Place and workshops, there are opportunities to make new connections, renew friendships, strengthen relationships between Aboriginal women, and share the positive energy that culture, and community, brings to each of us when we come together.

Today, Djirra stands as a beacon of hope and support for Aboriginal women. We have developed and implemented a range of culturally safe, specialist services, including legal support, individual supports, and unique cultural programs. Our programs have been recognised both internationally and by Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence as best practice.⁸ Our unique service model, with a number of soft entry points, ensures that Aboriginal women can overcome the intersecting barriers they face to access our critical support.

Djirra is the Woi Wurrung word for the reed used by Wurundjeri women for basket weaving. The word symbolises the intricate threads of connection between Aboriginal women, kept strong in stories of our past, present and future. We remain unbroken – despite the calamitous blows of colonisation – because we remain powerfully linked together.

Djirra has grown from Aboriginal women sharing their deepest and most painful stories – stories of strength, courage, and resilience. Djirra is shaped by our leadership's deep connection, but also by every Aboriginal woman's connection to community and our collective determination to create spaces where we are heard, valued, supported, and where our identity is validated, acknowledged and respected.

Over the years, Djirra continues to use our on-the-ground experience and the trust that Aboriginal women place in us to advocate for change. Across all levels of government, Djirra is a leading voice in the fight for justice and systemic reform. Djirra calls out systemic violence and racism to change policies and reform laws where they fail or target our people.

Leaving my beloved Djirra and being so far away from home is never easy. But I remained grounded and connected through my art. Each day of the Fellowship, I created art that helped me reflect on conversations and protect my spirit from some of the devastating and heartbreaking stories people shared. In cultural terms, I felt my dragonfly dreaming was watching over me, protecting me and keeping me strong. While painting I had no plan, but I started to notice each painting had a connection to where I was – I could see the streets of New York, the mountains in Montana, the blue ocean in Hawai'i, and the cultural strength from mother earth in Aotearoa New Zealand – coming through my art.

I carried wire and tools and made my own dragonfly sculptures, attaching them to cards to acknowledge and give thanks for the generosity I received. At other times, I gave spirit women rocks painted by my mother, Wanda Bargo. These gifts are so important – they tell a story and can leave an everlasting impression. Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Ottawa, had herbs and a basket laid out for visitors to take what they wanted. As First Nations people, giving is important and part of culture.

This journey was not my own. It belongs to the Aboriginal women who continue to place their trust and belief in me as the CEO of Djirra. Together with our Board and staff, Aboriginal women have entrusted us to carry this legacy into the future for generations to follow.



Above: *Dragonflies* (wire sculpture) against Hawai'i skyline. © Antoinette Braybrook AM



Right: *Women's Spirit* (acrylic on rocks). Wanda Bargo 2024 ©

Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre – a dedicated purpose-built space

Djirra's vision for Aboriginal women is rooted in empowerment, resilience, and self-determination. Djirra acknowledges the strength and resilience of Aboriginal women who have withstood centuries of violence, dispossession, and systemic racism. Djirra is unwavering in our commitment to place Aboriginal women at the centre of our work. Djirra is Aboriginal women's self-determination in action. Despite the devastating statistics, Aboriginal women are leaders, advocates, and nurturers. Djirra will create a tangible, bricks and mortar home where we as Aboriginal women are seen, heard, and respected, and where our experiences and solutions are central to dismantling systems of violence and injustice.

Djirra's vision is about hope and inspiring pride and recognition in Aboriginal women's self-determination, celebrating our culture and identity. Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre will be a gift to the people of Victoria. It will be a place of learning, reflection, and connection, inviting opportunities for all people to engage with and support the rich and beautiful culture and history of Victoria. It is the culmination of more than two decades of Djirra's vision.

Our vision emerged from the recognition that a dedicated, purpose-built space is essential to expand Djirra's services and ensure every Aboriginal woman in Victoria has access to the support she needs, no matter where she is located. A significant milestone towards achieving this vision was the purchase of our home in Abbotsford in 2014, which solidified our presence



and provided a stable base for Djirra's operations. We then launched and grew our Koori Women's Place from 2018, creating a new space of deep trust where Aboriginal women can share their truths, support one another, and find solutions in a culturally safe environment.

As a physical bricks and mortar space in one consistent location, the Koori Women's Place helped us test other aspects of the model for what Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre can become. We know, for example, that Aboriginal women's cultural connection and safety are the most common reason for accessing the Koori Women's Place, and that our online services expand our reach but offer less opportunity for the deeper connections that we have been aiming for. Our Koori Women's Place pivoted during COVID-19 lockdowns by offering our essential programs online, which provided a crucial point of connection, and refined the pathways through to other Djirra services.

Despite limited capacity in our current premises, the Koori Women's Place has allowed Djirra to enhance its approach, gather valuable insights, and ensure that the larger Centre will effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal women.

Realising Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre will represent the culmination of years and years of Djirra's journey, and the hard yards Djirra staff have invested to get us to where we are. It will be a blueprint for the nation – showing what Aboriginal women's self-determination really looks like in action – and serve as a cultural landmark and present-day legacy that celebrates the ongoing strength, resilience, and leadership of Aboriginal women.

Approaches and methods for the realisation of the Aboriginal Women's Centre

The journey through each of the locations and traditional lands I visited over the course of my Fellowship was a vital opportunity for me to learn more about the shared issues impacting First Nations, people and women under settler colonialism. It sparked many new ideas and provided exciting new perspectives to bring into our strategic planning for Djirra's expansion and Victoria's first dedicated Aboriginal Women's Centre to anchor that expansion.

On the most immediate and practical level, the insights and information gained will feed into an Aboriginal Women's Centre Feasibility Study, while also informing our Capital Fundraising and Partnership Strategy and, later, Business Case for the Aboriginal Women's Centre.

While all the agencies I visited during my Churchill Fellowship adopt what we at Djirra call a "holistic approach", they have different foundations and scopes of practice to Djirra, which will impact those models that will be most relevant to the expansion of our services and the establishment of an Aboriginal Women's Centre.

Appendix One: Overview of Projects and Programs by Agency summarises the core programs at each agency, providing:

- an overview of the various programs
- a brief description of how the agencies were funded and established
- cultural elements and design features
- potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

Of the mainstream meetings I attended, there are some important takeaways, and of course I have important solidarities with other people of colour, but my commitment is to embed *cultural* ways of understanding. This journey re-affirmed the importance of centring culture in Djirra's work, including visually and spatially, and through our methods of operation.

Inspired by the models I have witnessed overseas, I will be advocating to include Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre in the Statewide Treaty negotiations in Victoria⁹, as an opportunity to create a new cultural landmark that holds space for Aboriginal women's voices and aspirations, and extends the facilities and resources needed for Aboriginal women experiencing family and sexual violence.

We shared stories of capital expansion, exploring what works and what we can achieve. I witnessed other struggles and stories of resilience, through poverty, homelessness, incarceration, and child protection, which strengthened my commitment to Djirra's holistic approaches.

I step forward with some new ideas about partnerships and programs, new strategies for policy and advocacy, and new confidence in the path we are taking. I will use this experience to campaign even more loudly against racist attitudes, behaviours, and actions and stand firm with women in their decisions about their own lives.

This journey reflects and strengthens my commitment to amplify the voices of Aboriginal women. I am dedicated to advocating for system-wide change to ensure fair treatment and access to justice, eliminate systemic violence, and strengthen women's resilience. Every day, I am galvanised by the stories of our women – their experiences with family violence, systemic racism, the threat of child removal, the stress and trauma of poverty, and their fears and encounters with criminalisation and/or homelessness. Through this Fellowship and the establishment of Victoria's first Aboriginal Women's Centre, I am working to harness our culture, spirit and self-determination, now – and for the generations to come.

NOTES

7 Aboriginal women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised for a violent assault, 10 times more likely to die from a violent assault, and 7 times more likely to be murdered than other women (N 2, 3 and 4).

8 State of Victoria (March 2016), 'Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and recommendations, *Chapter 26 Family violence and diversity*', pp 20 & 52. <https://www.vic.gov.au/about-royal-commission-family-violence>

9 Victorian Government 'Pathway to Treaty' webpage (updated 18 July 2024). Published at: [Pathway to Treaty | firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au](https://firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au)





Weaving workshop at Djirra's 16 Days of ACTIVEism Festival, November 2024.

A cultural space is a healing space



Carrying Messages. Where rivers flow into oceans and streams, a natural path unfolds, creating safe passage to take the learnings home. © Antoinette Braybrook AM



As an Aboriginal woman, I have always known that our surroundings impact our health and wellbeing. Djirra has always sought to include cultural elements and artwork into our buildings, to provide strong visual cues of safety and identity.

This Fellowship allowed me to observe ways that other First Nations peoples have translated cultural wisdoms and practices into physical buildings and spaces to promote collective identity and healing.

I was excited to learn about a recent symposium called *Reclaiming our Spaces*, hosted by the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in Ottawa, which explored the wisdoms of traditional Indigenous spaces, and how they can be used to reconnect to one another in a post-pandemic world.

Ottawa and Quebec

My visit to **Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health** with Executive Director Allison Fisher, was a revelation. I was taken by how they have used space to create a sense of healing and culture. The entire building reflects a strong First Nations identity, providing a space where community members can feel a sense of belonging and cultural connection. Absolutely everything was infused with culture, even the toilets. My photos do not capture its energy, and I am not sure I can find the words to give it the meaning it so deserves. Wabano describe the Centre as a cultural gathering space through which the community can come together, reconnect, and learn from the teachings of the Elders. There is a strong role for the Elders as cultural knowledge keepers, not unlike our Djirra Keepers, and a reclaiming of culture as a pillar of healing.¹⁰

Wabano opened the Centre in 2013, with substantive government funding. As I approached the building, I could see that the architecture has incorporated traditional styles and symbols (e.g. circular designs that represent the medicine wheel) and the beauty of *natural* materials. And then the atmosphere and feel of the place filled me with a nourishing warmth and welcome as soon as I walked in the door.

The front desk itself appears like a canoe on the river, with the water reflected through coloured tiles. I learned that the canoe has connections to the past and the present – and also carries us into the future. Cultural elements like this were woven throughout the interior, with artwork, murals, and installations by Indigenous artists.

Wabano has created a genuine centre of excellence that bridges traditional knowledge and culture with contemporary health care. There were specific spaces to support traditional healing practices, such as sweat lodges and smudging rooms, and others to foster community gatherings, teachings, and ceremonies.

This visit has validated everything I have ever wanted for Djirra. When you walk through our doors, I want people to feel the energy – of love, support, cultural affirmation, self-determination – with no judgment.



Interior, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Ottawa.



Traditional herbs made available in a herb wheel, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Ottawa.



Circle room, Native Women's Association of Canada, Quebec.



The Sundance Room, Native Women's Association of Canada, Quebec.

The building was constructed with business acumen too, ensuring there is enough space to rent out, which serves the dual purpose of earning income and showcasing culture.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was established in 1974 as a coalition of Provincial and Territorial Member Organisations (PTMAs) and is well known for its policy and advocacy work. NWAC's new Social, Cultural and Innovation Centre is located in a central area in Quebec within a larger six-storey building. I was taken by powerful cultural elements in the design and feel of the physical space. From the outside, it looks like just another office block, but once I was inside, it was a completely different experience. The walls were covered in



Staff of the Native Women's Association Canada, Quebec, with Antoinette (centre).

art – breathtaking pieces – with so much colour and energy. They have a gift shop and a café, bringing income and selling cultural foods and other products. There was a beautiful roof top garden with a water feature and a greenhouse where I tried wild strawberries. The Social, Cultural and Innovation Centre was launched in 2022 and is a place of many rooms. I met with NWAC President McBride in 'The Grandmother Moon Room', and most enjoyed 'The Two Spirits Room' and 'The Sundance Room'. This last room was such a creative space. Look at the chairs... they are yellow and look like they are dancing!

NWAC has worked in partnership with some of its member organisations to establish local Resiliency Lodges. The lodges are an opportunity for land based, cultural knowledge and spiritual healing programming, delivering a range of online workshops as well as residential programs and events.¹¹

Minwaashin Lodge, Ottawa, led by Executive Director Mary Daoust, has just celebrated a 30-year anniversary and thus shares with Djirra the wisdom that comes from decades of working on the frontline. The organisation supports First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and children who are survivors of domestic and other forms of violence, and who may also be suffering the effects of the residential school system. All the programs and services incorporate cultural beliefs and values to ensure a holistic approach is used for healing. The Wisdom Keepers program reminded me of Djirra Keepers, heralding the cultural guidance of Elders. There's art, spaces to gather, and counselling rooms.

It is not just the physical elements of the space that matter, but how it is used to express and harness culture. Just as I was about to leave, mums and their kids started arriving into a large area where there was a big table and chairs. It was Tuesday night – community dinner night! We know all too well at Djirra how important it is to gather around food and share our stories well nourished. We had to push hard for funding to ensure Djirra's Koori Women's Place

was installed with a kitchen in the small space we had, and we have since enjoyed many gatherings and cooking workshops in this space.

Minwaashin Lodge has been advocating for many years now for funds to establish an Indigenous Women and Children's Healing Centre. They want to use these funds to host a residential addiction and mental health treatment program providing holistic, culturally safe treatment to Indigenous women with their children. I write more on this project below.

New York

When I arrived for my meeting with Judge Judy Kluger and Simone Monasebian at **Sanctuary for Families** in New York, I thought I had the wrong address! I was standing in front of a tall city building that looked something like a public service office block. I soon realised that, like NWAC, Sanctuary for Families occupies a floor of this huge building - with many different spaces and offices offering direct assistance, safety and support. I started to see possibilities of being able to create safe and healing spaces in so many different places - even large multi-storey buildings. This has certainly given me a different perspective and more to talk and think about in the planning for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

Hawai'i

Ho'oulu 'Āina is a 100-acre nature preserve nestled in the back of Kalihi valley on the island of O'ahu, cared for by Kōkkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, a nonprofit community health centre. Educational spaces are integrated into the design, ensuring that cultural teachings are a core function of the facility.



Puni Jackson, Program Director, Ho'oulu 'Āina, with Antoinette, Kokua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services, Hawai'i.

Puni Jackson, Program Director, has been instrumental in establishing Ho’oulu ‘Āina as a healing refuge for the community. She warmly welcomed us and took us on a tour of the farm, showing us healing plants and allowing us to visit an area dedicated to women who have lost children to gun violence. I could feel the intense grief, but also the love and healing emanating from the stillness and lush green trees planted by mums and families who have lost their child.

Ho’oulu ‘Āina prioritises holistic healing through culturally based programs and practices. Many of the programs are land based, located on the large reserve which is leased to them by government, and are open to all Hawaiian residents. Ho’oulu ‘Āina offers a range of cultural programs including Koa ‘Āina (native reforestation, restoring water, weed management, etc); Hoa ‘Āina (community access, including over 5,000 volunteers); Mahi ‘Āina (community food production, including community gardens); and Lohe ‘Āina (cultural preservation, restoring ancient sites and places, sharing stories, workshops and other education). It is a designated learning site for schools and has developed curriculum for K-12 students.¹²

Ho’oulu ‘Āina highlights the deep connections between land and healing that resonate strongly across many First Nations cultures. I could see again how much we have in common, while also honouring the differences, that is, the distinct places and cultures that have shaped us. This recognition of shared values and distinct cultural differences emphasises the unique ways that we, as First Nations peoples, engage with our lands, waters, and cultural traditions while also drawing strength from our common experiences.



Grounds of the Native Hawaiian Traditional Healing Centre, Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health, Hawai'i.



Above: Gwen John, Co-Chair, Heretaunga Women's Centre, Hastings, Aotearoa New Zealand with Antoinette.



Right: Interior, Nga Hau E Wha National Marae, Christchurch.

The Native Hawaiian Traditional Healing Centre is part of Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health, promoting Native Hawaiian healing and cultural education and practices. Co-location with the health centre enables integration of healing practices with medical care.

Aotearoa New Zealand

In Aotearoa New Zealand I was thrilled to visit the **Ngā Hau e Whā National Marae**. Marae are traditional Māori communal meeting places, central to Māori culture and identity. They serve as both physical and spiritual spaces where cultural, social, and political activities take place. A marae typically consists of several buildings, with the wharenuī (meeting house) as the focal point, embodying the ancestors of the community.

I was shown through the marae by Henare Edwards. Henare is a Kaumatua (Elder) and Chairman of Te Rūnanga o Ngā Maata Waka, the Urban Māori Authority in Christchurch and the Guardians of the Marae. It is a place of deep spiritual significance which was evident as soon as I walked in. It was such a powerful experience – I was able to soak up the energy and presence of the space. The marae is also functional – used for cultural ceremonies, gatherings and meetings, important decisions, and for access to a range of support services through the buildings behind. Marae are important in the passing down of Māori language, customs, history, and values and often have programs to teach younger generations about their heritage. Through these and other functions, marae are central to Māori cultural life, embodying both continuity and resilience in the face of colonisation.

Everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand knows what a marae is – a special place for all people – and this comes with a sense of ownership and pride. I want this same thing for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre – a place that people identify with, a source of pride through which we can all experience and celebrate Aboriginal culture.



I met with Tanya McCall from the **National Public Health Service**, a division within Te Whatu Ora – the new health authority. We talked about the 2016 Kaikōura/Christchurch earthquake and its ongoing effects. I visited the memorial near the Kowhai River the day before, it was a peaceful place for healing and reflection. The proximity to the river adds a powerful natural element – symbolising resilience and the flow of life despite the disruption caused by the earthquake – and this location offers the river a visibility and broad cultural significance that may not have been visible before. I couldn’t help comparing the ways in which this event is memorialised, and how hard we have to fight for recognition of our experiences as First Nations peoples and the ongoing impacts on our lives and communities.

My time in Aotearoa New Zealand more broadly allowed me to reflect on both the similarities and differences among our people. It was truly heartening to hear people speaking Māori language and drawing connection, togetherness and resilience from marae across the country.

Djirra’s vision for the Aboriginal Women’s Centre has developed in the context of our own history and culture, as well as the knowledge gained through our frontline services. As we are not a health service or an organisation for traditional owners, we are not grounding our model in primary health care services, traditional medicines or land-based healing. However, it is evident that these approaches align with our holistic understanding of wellbeing through First Nations world views and reinforce the importance of culturally grounded practices in fostering healing.

A cultural space is a healing space.

NOTES

10 Wabano (2023), *Annual Report 22-23*. Published online at: <https://wabano.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WC-23-AGM-booklet-web.pdf>, pp.13, 44.

11 Native Women’s Association of Canada Annual General Assembly (2023), *Annual Report 2022-2023*. Published online at: https://nwac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/AGA-2023-Report-V8_Compressed.pdf, pp. 56-61.

12 Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Health Services (2021), *Annual Report* Published online at: <https://www.kkv.net/annualreport>.

Recognising complexities:

finance, design, construction and program expansion



Clarity. Clarity emerges as Dragonfly dances through the ribbons, each one a whisper of the gentle breeze – it's time to return to the belonging of home, and embrace and comfort of family. © Antoinette Braybrook AM

To realise our vision for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, it is now clearer than ever that we will need substantial funding, effective planning, and a well-coordinated process. We have delivered capital projects before, including Djirra's Koori Women's Place, but not yet on the scale envisaged for our Aboriginal Women's Centre. I wanted to learn from other agencies how they achieved this for their own projects, or what got in their way.

Appendix One in this report, Overview of Projects and Programs by Agency, provides an overview of information about the most relevant cultural centres and capital projects, sorted by agency. I have included information about the cultural design elements, to ensure we can account for this meaningfully in our planning (including the involvement of Elders) and application processes at Djirra. This chapter speaks to my findings across the relevant agencies more broadly and is intended to be supplemented by the individual agency information in these tables.



Lasi Kailea, Koori Women's Place Senior Support Worker, with Antoinette, preparing Christmas hampers for distribution, December 2024.

But first, I would like to reflect on what Djirra has learnt already. Securing a grant in 2013 to purchase our first building with the support of the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation was exciting, but we knew we didn't have the space we needed to fully realise our dreams. By the time we moved in, and as we grew in staffing and client numbers, every corner of the new building was in high demand. Despite the limited space, later we were able to open the doors to our Koori Women's Place. I am very proud of this work, through which Djirra has been able to test and evaluate different components of the model.

When we expanded the scope of our service model, broadening our Individual Support Services as a core Djirra offering, we had to make some complex decisions about how best to co-locate legal services and other holistic supports, without compromising our clients' right to legal privilege. I fought hard to preserve our clients' access to legal assistance without having to risk child protection involvement through the different reporting obligations of other professions we might engage. In the following section of this report, I explore this further as it will have implications again for both infrastructure and program design in Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

I know through these experiences that there is a price to be paid when the building is neither purpose built nor sufficiently fit for purpose. We need to ensure Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre is large enough for our vision and, ideally, with capacity to be reconfigured or expanded as our programs change. We need the physical space and capacity to create an information barrier between the legal team and other parts of the organisation. This is just one important example of what needs to be considered in designing the Centre.

Djirra has initially identified Darebin, Yarra, Merri-bek, and Melbourne City. Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre Prospectus details our concept pitch and will be used when we meet with these Councils for discussions about their interest in the project and likely availability of suitable land and/or buildings.

My Churchill Fellowship tour has delivered something vital I was hoping for – some fresh strategies and approaches to get our physical centre funded, constructed, and operational. This includes some different approaches to developing the strong cultural design elements inspired by the centres I visited. Then, building on Djirra's strong foundations in Country and culture, Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre holds many opportunities to grow, with further life breathed into it through the strength, capabilities, and resilience of Aboriginal women in Victoria.

Foundations and building blocks

Our vision to establish Victoria's first Aboriginal Women's Centre will cost money. The costs for capital projects are complex and must come from multiple sources. Not every organisation wants to calculate, let alone disclose, the cost of every element, and this was one question I did not want to ask. I was interested to know if there was anything I had not yet considered, as well as the stories that sat behind each project.

Djirra has estimated that the costs of implementing Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre are likely to be significant including, to start, capital funding for the following building blocks:

- land acquisition: Funding (or gift of land) to purchase or lease the land
- construction costs for architectural design, building materials, labour, and infrastructure
- facility equipment and furnishings: To fit-out the centre with the necessary equipment, furniture, and technology to support Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre programs and services
- cultural and artistic installations.

We must also factor in new operational costs and funding for Centre staffing, such as reception/administrative staff, maintenance, and Centre management as well any cultural leadership that is specific to this space. And, finally, there are process costs – the feasibility





studies, business cases, consultation, and campaign costs. Some of these will show up as additional costs, and some are less evident, like the time costs of our existing staff in operationalising the new Aboriginal Women's Centre.

I am also inspired to do more planning for the visual culture elements, as they will require their own funding for commissioning artworks, installations, and other cultural representations.

Minwaashin Lodge's vision for an Indigenous Women and Children's Healing Centre is an ambitious one, requiring significant investment for an organisation that is already battling against funding insecurity and high demand for their services. Their Feasibility Study (2015) and Business Case (2017) set out a goal of securing an interim leasing arrangement initially, through which they would retrofit a demonstration site for the first five years, with a view to establishing the full vision for the Centre over a longer period. In terms of a phased approach, this is not dissimilar to what Djirra has done with the Koori Women's Place. However, though they have secured the agreement of the City of Ottawa to contribute the land, they do not have the capital funding required to build the Centre itself.

I also heard stories that reflect the politics of land and country. When Wabano selected a site for their new centre, they purchased all the surrounding buildings to avoid a barrage of racist complaints. This worked well in some ways, giving scope to expand Wabano services as they grew. But it is a painful reminder that colonisation is still with us, and that our buildings' foundations are on stolen land that the majority do not want us to hold. This is not news to Djirra – racism continues to be a significant issue for us and the women we support. In 2022, Djirra experienced a racist objection to establishing our new office in Melbourne's west. In 2023, racist graffiti scrawled across Djirra's sign directly related to our information sessions about the national referendum for a First Nations Voice to Parliament.

In Hawai'i, the establishment of Ho'oulu 'Āina was enabled by a 20-year lease from the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources in 2005, following a long history of campaigns and local government processes to protect the land from residential and other development. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the organisation He Waka Tapu achieved full ownership of their Te Aranga Clinic, a purpose-built facility across the road from the marae.

Funding strategies

I was interested to see a range of partnership and fundraising approaches, and the resources required to ensure they are successful. Every agency had its process of engaging with potential partners to secure the necessary resources.

Minwaashin Lodge did a lot of work with the Local Health Integration Network and the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition to plan and secure formal support for the project and worked with the City of Ottawa to identify suitable land. The NWCA worked in partnership with their Provincial and Territorial Member Associations to submit joint proposals for local Resiliency Lodges through a 'Cultural Spaces in Indigenous Communities' government funding call.

It is important to give recognition where it's due. I loved Wabano's Recognition Wall, which listed names of people who had donated to the Centre. While Djirra does recognise those who give to us, I can now see how we could use my mother Wanda Bargo's women's spirit design bearing names of donors as a centre piece of recognition.

The Urban Resource Institute in New York established the 'Friends of Urban Resource Institute', which has parallels to our home-grown Djirra Ambassadors program, and offered further opportunities for involvement and championing by philanthropists and community leaders. This engagement strategy was evident in 2023, when a Blueprint for Change Discussion Series convened by the Institute brought together policy makers, advocates, specialists, and survivors to recommend a coordinated and systemic approach to addressing gender-based violence and homelessness. I suspect the Institute's programs, advocacy and training about the intersection of pets and domestic violence has touched the hearts of many, and I noticed the list of institutional and public funders in their 2022 annual report was both lengthy and impressive.

Many of the agencies hosted fundraising gala events to celebrate major milestones and achievements. Sanctuary for Families marked their 40-year anniversary event this year with a 'Zero Tolerance' Benefit, hosted by Brooke Shields and Ali Wentworth. Wabano hosted an annual gala – Igniting the Spirit – bringing people together to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day.

Ho'oulu 'Āina engages in community-driven fundraising efforts, including events, campaigns, and cultural activities that raise both awareness and funds. Five thousand volunteers benefit through greater cultural understanding and connections to land through regenerative work and reciprocal healing. The Women's Fund of Hawai'i have leveraged access to high profile philanthropists – such as Oprah Winfrey – to support over 350 small grants for women and girls across Hawai'i, primarily through grass roots organisations, and a social enterprise retail store online.

To help us achieve our vision, Djirra's Prospectus and Partnership Strategy for our Aboriginal Women's Centre will guide our efforts in securing vital funding and support for this important initiative. In this context, it is important to highlight the strong community support Djirra has built and nurtured over the years.

In 2005, Djirra successfully obtained Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status. Over the past two decades, Djirra has led a successful grassroots fundraising campaign, resulting in a passionate and dedicated support base within our community. This critical funding stream remains essential to Djirra's sustainability, and we plan to leverage this collective support in establishing our Aboriginal Women's Centre.

Revenue generation and social enterprise

In the spirit of self-determination, I was curious about ideas for social enterprises as avenues of independent income generation and how well these were working in practice. While many of these are successful, social enterprises require a significant investment of resources to work, and risk running at a loss. The centres I visited that had thriving social enterprises still received their major capital and operational funding from other sources.

An endowment fund can generate ongoing income to support a centre's operations, programs, and future expansions. For example, the Women's Fund of Hawai'i received an endowment fund as a private donation, established in honour of a previous donor, and offered more opportunities for corporate involvement through hosting events or in-kind donations.





There are challenges with these models. There can be tensions between cultural integrity or purpose, and commercial viability. Volunteer programs take resources and staff time and can divert attention from the core purpose and vision. But I am interested in social enterprises because they are a source of independent funding which supports self-determination, however modest the amount.

NWAC has several social enterprises – an events space, a shop and a café and catering service. This produces an annual income which increased by C\$600,000 in 2022–3, with more growth expected in coming years¹³. Of course, NWAC are a national association and can work on a larger scale. And this figure sounds high, until you learn that, in 2024, NWAC lost its National Apprenticeship Funding along with the end of other programs and its annual revenue dropped from C\$48 million to C\$10 million.¹⁴ Then it starts to look like survival. Djirra will be crunching our own numbers when we do our Business Case. As we say, Djirra is Aboriginal women’s self-determination in action.

There are other benefits of social enterprise programs too. They contributed significantly to the visual culture, atmosphere and experience of each place. I was able to eat traditional foods through a café and market garden, learn about medicinal plants, or book healing and wellness services. I could buy cultural artworks, as well as culturally themed food, clothes, jewellery, soap, and other products. If I wanted to host a meeting or event, I could choose between culturally themed rooms, with a range of designs and concepts to give my audience a meaningful cultural experience.

As a visitor, I valued the cultural learning I accessed through these spaces. They were an important part of each organisation’s public face and carried stories of cultural practice. They provided opportunities for allies like me to make financial contributions to the work of the agency and, through this, to actively buy into the success of the vision.

The social enterprises also provided training, employment and personal income, and as such held the potential to contribute to economic empowerment strategies in each community. Artisanelle is NWAC’s online boutique, featuring Indigenous artists and artisans, providing a platform for Indigenous creators and ensuring fair compensation. Wabano has its own chocolates shipped across Turtle Island Canada, houses a gift shop that sells crafts and artworks, hosts cultural and learning events, and offers fee-based wellness services. The Women’s Fund of Hawai’i runs its own online shop and provides grant funding for social enterprises and grassroots start-ups. The Eastern Refuge Society, Auckland, sells t-shirts with a dual purpose – to raise funds and community awareness. Some of the other agencies, including Maata Waka and He Waka Tapu, deliver their own training, conferences and/or forums, which can have a dual purpose of sharing and strengthening culture with income generation.

There is a link between the cultural design elements in the centres I visited and the ability to generate income through renting out the facilities to other parties. Accessing these cultural spaces offers a different experience to renting a mainstream meeting room and will add a value to the agencies renting the space while showcasing our cultural strength and pride.

Process matters

First Nations peoples know that process matters. How we do something can matter as much as what we do. Djirra will always endeavour to do our business culturally, with respect, and yet in ways that will work in the dominant colonial system. This is not an easy task.

Djirra will follow a complex and carefully planned process to establish the Aboriginal Women's Centre as a vital resource for Aboriginal women, offering a safe, supportive, and empowering environment that facilitates healing, growth, and cultural pride. Engaging First Nations architects and cultural experts alongside the involvement and guidance of our Elders can ensure the design aligns with traditional values, such as connection to land and community, and includes spaces for cultural practices like healing, gatherings, and ceremonies. And our process must of course include respect for the traditional owners and protocols regarding working on country.

Appendix One - Overview of Projects and Programs by Agency includes a summary of what I know of the capital expansion projects undertaken in recent years by the agencies I visited throughout my Churchill Fellowship tour. This information can inform our development of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, sharing a strong focus on community engagement, cultural grounding, and practical steps to ensure successful implementation.

NOTES

13 Native Women's Association of Canada, *Annual Report*, p.210 https://nwac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/AGA-2023-Report-V8_Compressed.pdf

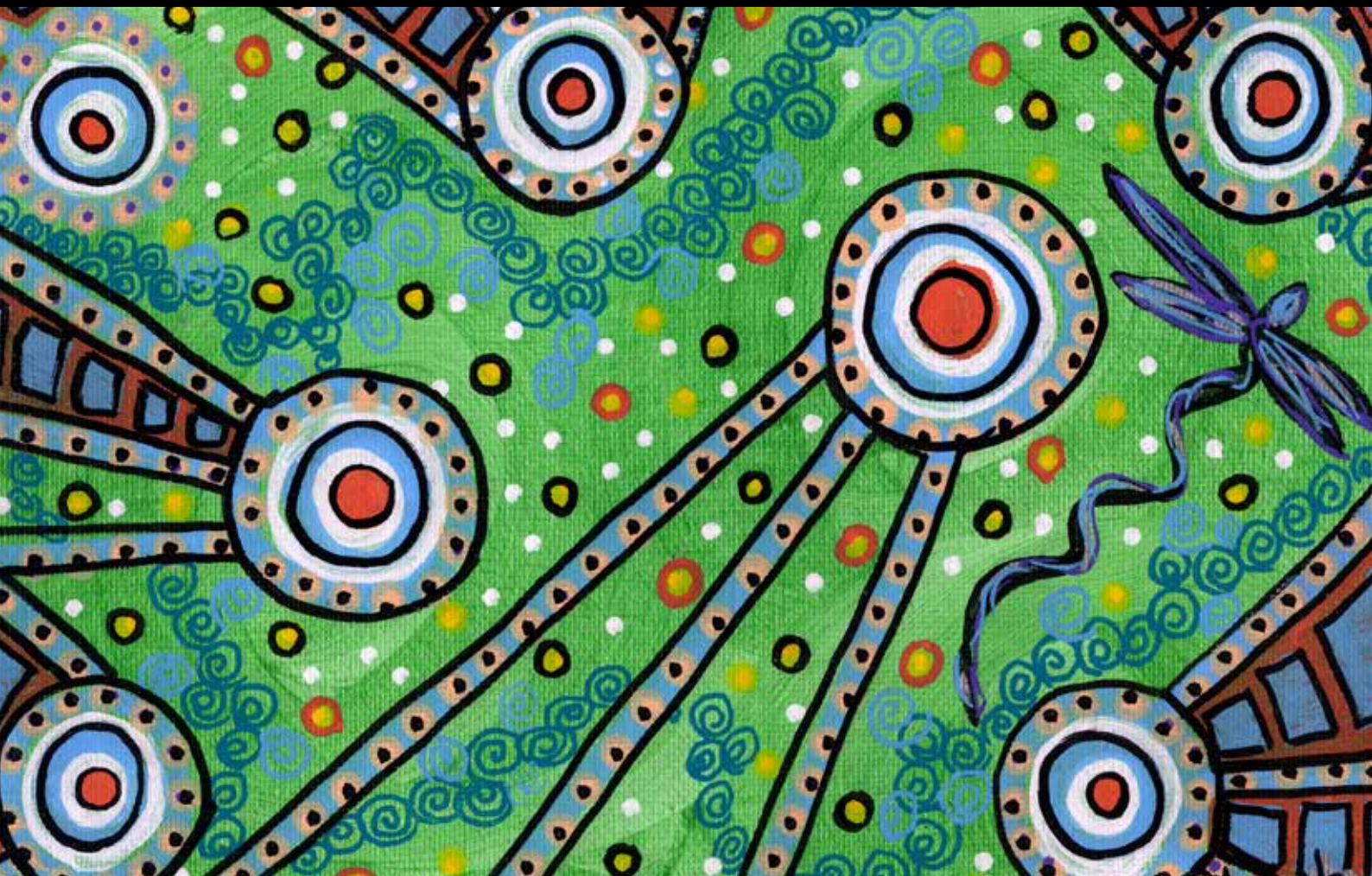
14 Native Women's Association of Canada. Media Release March 28 2024. Published online at <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2024/03/28/2854167/0/en/NWAC-demands-that-federal-government-provide-Indigenous-non-profit-organizations-with-stable-core-funding-after-being-forced-to-lay-off-half-its-staff.html>.





Gunditjmara Gunai Kurnai woman and Djirra Cultural Resource Worker, Adeline Thomas, at the opening of Djirra in the West, Melton, July 2023.

Self-determined, holistic services and solutions



Shades of Green. Look closely and you will discover countless shades of green. Trees, grass and foliage - all alive and thriving. Gathering at lookout points reveal an unimaginable, indescribable and picturesque landscape in Glacier National Park, Montana, USA. © Antoinette Braybrook AM



Family violence is a pervasive issue that transcends the boundaries of systems – that is, the traditional divisions that can exist between health and social services and the legal system. Djirra has always addressed family violence as both a social and legal issue, knowing this is crucial in developing effective responses. This chapter explores the importance of holistic, tailored support, highlighting some new approaches and common challenges when working across health, justice, and other services.

Holistic health and justice models will ideally consider all social determinants of health – such as economic stability, education, social and community context, health care access, and the physical environment – in their approach to supporting individuals affected by family violence. This doesn't mean we do everything within one agency. By expanding possibilities for collaboration across sectors and specialisations, we can create a more comprehensive system that better supports and empowers survivors.

Expanded courts – holistic models in legal settings

My tour in New York focused on agencies working within or with the courts and legal system. I was very interested in what holistic models can look like in these settings. This revealed some innovative practices that can not only enhance the legal responses to family violence but also promote the overall wellbeing of individuals and communities.

I went into my meeting with the Centre for Justice Innovation in New York excited to learn more, knowing that Victoria's Neighbourhood Justice Centre grew from this idea. After some introductions to centre staff and lawyers, I had an opportunity to sit in on one of the custody cases, and to observe and speak with the Judge in her chambers. We talked about how too many people fall through the cracks in the system, while others find ways to use it to their advantage. While I know it is improving, we have the same challenges where our court systems sometimes don't connect.

The Midtown Community Justice Centre in Manhattan, New York, is known as a problem-solving court and was another inspiration for the Neighbourhood Justice Centre. It draws on internal and external collaborations to provide holistic case management, counselling, and community referrals. It reminded me that the strongest outcomes are possible when we take holistic approaches in the moments our communities come into contact with the law.

Other possibilities can also expand through this approach. The Red Hook Community Justice Centre in Brooklyn, New York facilitates community-led restitution projects in combined civil, family and criminal court situations. That is, where a single Judge can hear cases that would normally cross all three courts. These projects provide for strong partnerships with stakeholders, and increased access to a range of social services, and strong outcomes

including reduced jail time and fines. Research informs their programming and vice versa. I have been thinking more about how these Centres use collaboration to work closely with both systems and communities, to bridge the gap between them.

After visiting these agencies in New York and Montana, I wondered whether the tribal governance arrangements in Turtle Island U.S. led to less support for First Nations people living off the reserves. That is, I was not aware of any equivalent to our community-controlled sector outside the boundaries of a tribal reservation. While I will always support self-determination, at least some of these 'mainstream' agencies aimed to understand the challenges facing First Nations women and had programs to support them.



Lindsay Price Jackson (left), Associate Director, Midtown Community Justice Center, New York City, with Antoinette.

Expanded information sharing

One theme that really came through in my meetings was a sharing of concerns about professionals who have mandatory reporting obligations and how this obligation contributes to high rates of child removal. In the Australian context at least, this is also a cultural issue that needs a historical understanding of the role that authorities like child protection had in removing Aboriginal children from their families throughout colonisation (known as the Stolen Generations), and an acknowledgement that this continues today.

Sanctuary for Families is dedicated to the safety and healing of victim-survivors of family and gendered violence. Starting with a shelter and daycare in the 1980s, Sanctuary for Families now offers holistic support across a range of programs, including legal services, children's programs, transitional shelter, support for victims of trafficking, and advocacy. It was great to meet with another legal service and discuss some of our challenges in this space. I met with



Judge Judy Kluger, CEO, and Simone Monasebian, Chief Program Officer. As we talked, it was very clear that women accessing Sanctuary for Families know it is a safe space where they are believed, valued, and can get the practical support they need.

We talked a lot about legal privilege and preserving client confidence, and our shared challenge when it comes to information barriers and mandatory and best interests reporting. Judge Kluger said that a “when in doubt – report” approach to child safety is resulting in extremely high rates of child removal in New York. Today in Victoria, Aboriginal children are being removed from their mums, families and communities at rates far greater than any time since white settlement, more than double the national average.¹⁵

Djirra is committed to preserving client legal privilege against this backdrop of mandatory reporting. Our lawyers have much narrower reporting obligations than social workers and other professions, which led Djirra to establish an information barrier as other services expanded. This means that professionals with mandatory and/or best interests reporting obligations do not have access to information shared with a lawyer, which ensures it remains protected by client legal privilege. It also means that lawyers do not inadvertently access information shared with another Djirra team that could compromise their ability to act on behalf of the client.

Maintaining an information barrier has implications for our service model, including how staff work together, access information, and communicate about clients across teams. While Djirra already works within a holistic model, and continues to aim for a seamless journey through Djirra’s Aboriginal Women’s Centre, this does mean that our women sometimes have to repeat aspects of their story when they are speaking to different parts of the organisation. Djirra is currently exploring different options for a more streamlined and integrated service delivery model, whilst also ensuring there is no risk to our clients’ legal privilege and trust in our service. For Djirra’s Aboriginal Women’s Centre to continue with an information barrier, we require the capacity to maintain some physical separation between teams and client information.

It was so validating for me to learn that Sanctuary for Families is battling many of the same issues and could get into the nitty gritty with me about why they are important. Sanctuary for Families made the very difficult decision not to offer legal support for child protection to their clients. In the context of extremely high rates of Aboriginal child removals in Victoria, this would be untenable for Djirra. It is my strong view that Aboriginal women deserve to have their legal rights preserved, not diminished.

Where the Centre for Justice Innovation requires collaboration between lawyers and mandated reporters such as social workers, they have chosen to use information barriers to protect legal privilege. YWCA Billings offer both case management and legal advocacy, but I was unfortunately not able to speak to anyone about this during my site visit. Issues with child protection came up in Turtle Island Canada, including in my meeting with Minister Lappe, and in Aotearoa New Zealand, with Māori organisations who advised that they stay as far away from child protection as possible.

New program possibilities

One of my key insights through the Fellowship is the link between social enterprises and economic empowerment. That is, while social enterprises have a range of benefits, including independent revenue, they can also support the economic empowerment of communities

and individuals through their work. The program model at Sanctuary for Families felt most relevant to Djirra, and inspiring for our future work, though I am aware of what an undertaking this would be.

By integrating social enterprise and economic empowerment programs into Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, Djirra can contribute to sustainable pathways for economic independence, cultural expression, and community empowerment. These initiatives provide financial support and can strengthen belonging and cultural pride among Aboriginal women.

Incorporating traditional knowledge and practices into social enterprises and other economic empowerment programs, such as workshops on traditional crafts, healing practices, or bush tucker cooking, can strengthen and showcase cultural heritage while creating economic opportunities.

1. Developing a Social Enterprise Model

Incorporating feedback from Aboriginal women in the community about the types of social enterprise initiatives they would find beneficial ensures that programs are tailored to their needs and interests. Djirra could host conversations and seek feedback through community forums or surveys to facilitate this, whilst being mindful of not building expectations.

Options informed by this tour include:

- creating and selling culturally inspired products. Collaborating with our community artists and artisans can ensure that the products reflect Aboriginal culture while providing income for creators
- a café or catering that features traditional cuisine, or market garden that sells bush foods and plants. This approach could promote cultural heritage and employ women from the community, providing them with job training and gardening or culinary skills
- facility rentals using culturally themed rooms
- Space to host our own conferences and forums on a fee-for-service basis.

Engaging with other successful social enterprises can provide Djirra with valuable insights and strategies for building a sustainable enterprise model. There may also be funding opportunities specifically aimed at supporting social enterprises, including crowdfunding campaigns to raise support for specific social enterprise projects which can engage the community and generate initial funding while building a network of supporters.

2. Establishing an Economic Empowerment Program

In addition to economic opportunities available through the initiatives above, Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre could:

- host skill development workshops to enhance skills in areas such as financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing
- establish mentorship programs or other opportunities where successful Aboriginal women in business guide and support those looking to start their own ventures
- establish partnerships with other local businesses which can create pathways for job placements and apprenticeships for women.

Over the longer term, there might be opportunities for a substantive workforce program that supports Aboriginal women to find work which does not trap them in poverty, but instead



offers them a decent wage and career track. At Sanctuary for Families this includes a living stipend, advanced IT training and professional development, literacy skills, professional clothing, support with meals and transport and childcare services, and of course access to Sanctuary's suite of holistic supports.

This latter model is a daunting but also exciting prospect. It is outside our current expertise and would require an extensive development phase, as well as grants from government bodies, foundations, or philanthropic organisations to develop and launch these initiatives. Sanctuary for Families has found that it can transform women's lives, not just through practical support (including financial), but through the impact it has on the women's self-belief and sense of hope and possibility for the future.

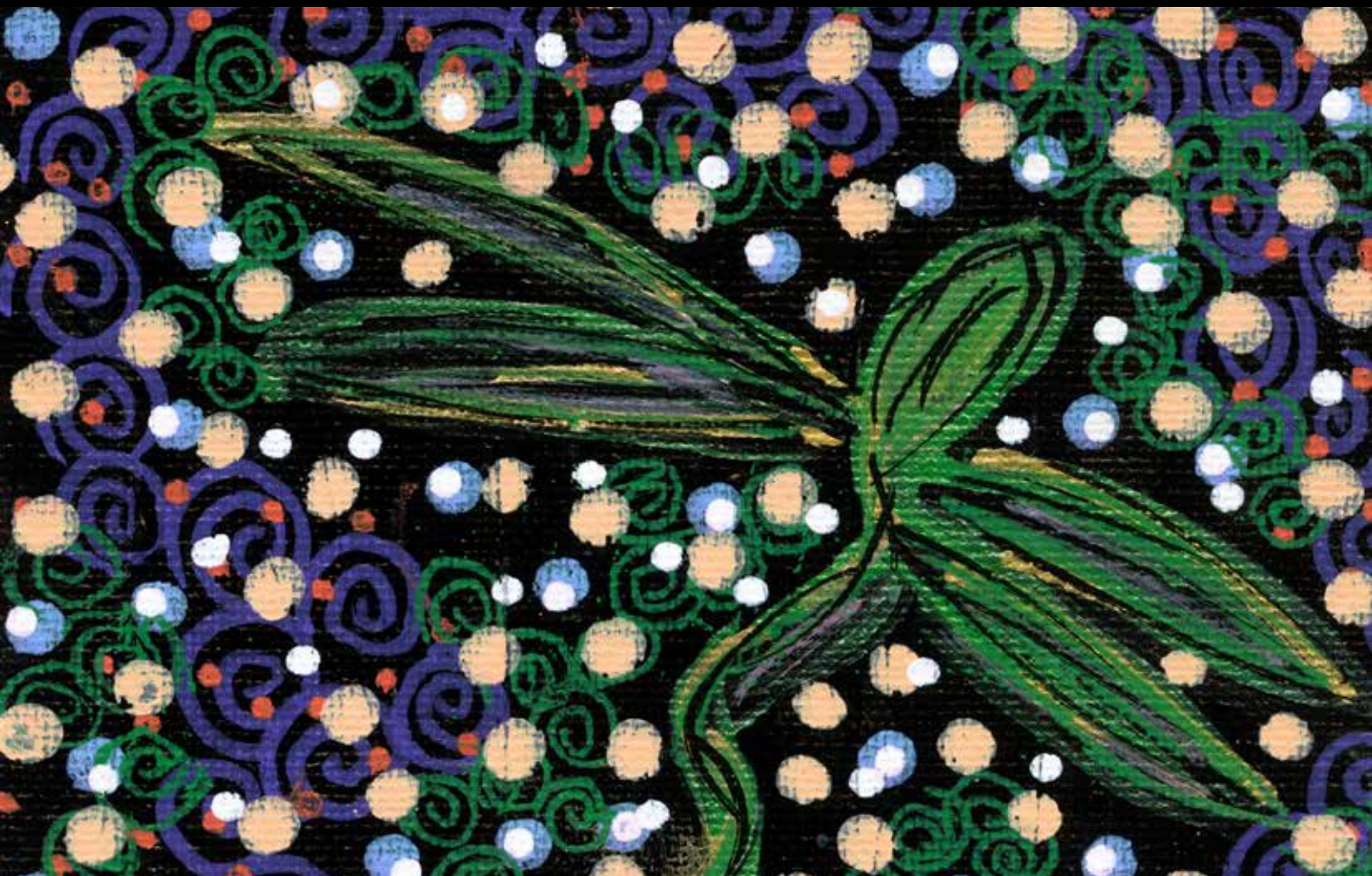
NOTES

15 SNAICC, *Family Matters Report 2023*, p. 24 (Released July 2024) <https://www.snaicc.org.au/resources/family-matters-report-2023/>



Kent Staines with Antoinette, South Island Aotearoa New Zealand, September 2024.

Powerful voices challenging enduring injustice



Sleepless City. Lost in Central Park, forgetting for a moment the wild energy of the city that never sleeps. © Antoinette Braybrook AM



I had so much in common with the people I encountered on this journey, including the ways that we – as not-for-profit leaders and organisations – are calling out and tackling the effects of systemic violence and racism. It was humbling. But most impactful for me personally was what I learned about the shared experiences of colonisation of First Nations women and peoples and the ongoing impacts in the present day.

It is well known that the relationships between First Nations people and the settler colonial state are impacted by the presence or absence of treaties and what sits inside those treaties, and that this varies across different locations. It is occasionally mentioned that, as First Nations peoples in Australia, Turtle Island Canada, Turtle Island U.S., Hawai'i and Aotearoa New Zealand, we shared active resistance through brutal Frontier Wars and continue to experience the active downplaying of the mass murders that occurred. Many people would not know that we all experienced, and continue to experience, cultural assimilation/genocide through the removal of our children, whether through the systemic rollout of residential and boarding schools, or through placement in other state and church institutions or non-Indigenous families. Where there have been efforts to apologise, or to inquire into the truth of the matter, the recommendations associated with those processes are unfulfilled and our fight to keep our children continues to the present day.

It is so important that we all understand the shared weaponry and impacts of settler colonialism more than we do, and that we learn from what this tells us.

I could make similar comparisons on the impacts of all of this. First Nations women are assaulted, hospitalised, and killed at far greater rates than other women. Systems violence – harm caused by racist and punitive policing and other systems – is often just as dangerous as men's violence. All over the world, it is First Nations women doing the heavy lifting to keep women and children safe, offering culturally safe, holistic services and creating spaces and services to support First Nations women and their children escaping violence without judgment.

Djirra continues to advocate strongly for Aboriginal women who are brutally disappeared and murdered in our country. In August 2024, the Australian Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children released its final report.¹⁶ While we welcomed the recommendations, some of these did not go as far as we would have liked. We have called for urgent implementation of the recommendation for governments to invest in frontline, specialist, Aboriginal-led support services for our women and children experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. Djirra is one of these frontline services and our life-saving work continues to be chronically underfunded. On the day of the release of the Australian report, I was travelling through Montana for my next scheduled meeting. Just as with every other place I had visited through Turtle Island U.S. and Canada, the signage and compelling images and stories of women and children lost to their communities, leaving in their place grieving spirits and wounded hearts, was starkly apparent. The parallels between our own experiences and those of First Nations women half a globe away, struck a deep chord with me as I reflected on how often I had witnessed it.

Travelling through Montana, preparing a statement and notes to speak to media about the report, I remember just for a slight moment I had lost hope. But almost as quickly, the fire in my belly was reignited by the incredible people I met working on the frontline of First Nations women's safety. I knew I had to remain strong and keep up the fight for what was to come back home – more inaction from our government and further attempts to silence and make us invisible. However, there was now a profound difference: First Nations sisters, allies and confidantes in Turtle Island Canada, U.S. and in our near neighbour, Aotearoa, with whom we can share evolving knowledge, strategise and plan our next moves, cultural imperatives and emotional support.

In Appendix Three, Violence against First Nations Women, including Missing and Murdered Women, I highlight the pervasiveness of the issues in each of the places I visited, and some common themes in our governments' responses. This table can't do justice to the complexity of the issues covered, but it makes such an important point about the parallels between First Nations women's experiences.



Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Montana.



Our different experiences inform our perspectives too. I was often aware that – to the local First Nations people in each area – I am a stranger. In Turtle Island U.S. I spent much of my time reaching out to introduce myself, asking questions, until I was lucky enough to be invited into Blackfeet Indian Reservation, home to the 17,321 member Blackfeet Nation who are one of the largest tribes in the United States.

I received such a warm welcome at Blackfeet and was able to spend time speaking with their Domestic Violence Unit. I painted this image inspired by the Glacier National Park.

The women at Blackfeet were interested in learning more about Djirra, including our holistic programs. I shared stories and examples of Djirra's work – and the real difference we make to Aboriginal women's and children's safety every day. Here, I experienced similar feelings to those when I met First Nations women in Turtle Island Canada. All of us working on the



Glacier National Park, Montana USA. An effort to capture the beauty of Glacier National Park - a place so picturesque, so unimaginable and indescribable; it transcends words. © Antoinette Braybrook AM

frontline of women's and children's safety. All with strong cultural values. All dealing with highly complex issues with limited resources.

The mega wealth in Manhattan amplified the extremities of poverty - so many people living on the streets and begging for food or money for the basics of daily living. In every meeting I had in New York, we spoke of homelessness and mental health issues, with disproportionate impacts on people of colour and First Nations women. I had to remember that 'mainstream' can have a different meaning here, as many of the organisations are led by inspirational African Americans and other people of colour, but without the distinctive cultural governance and links to self-determination set out in the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

There are other similarities and differences here to our experiences in Australia. I noticed the term "urban displacement" was used to describe First Nations people in Turtle Island U.S. who may be disconnected from the cultural support systems and communities available on tribal lands. As in Australia, First Nations women in urban areas seem to be less visible to funders and policy makers, and less likely to have access to culturally safe services or representation through political advocacy. And yet the rates of family violence, racism and systemic discrimination, health, economic, education, and housing disparities, intergenerational removals and foster care placements, continue. Urban displacement exists in our country too.

In Hawai'i, the issues and challenges I talked with people about were very similar to what we experience back home. We walked down the beach the day I arrived, to dip our feet in the

warm water. At the beach, I took a photo of a poster about a missing young Native Hawaiian woman, six months pregnant. A couple of nights later, while listening to the news, I heard her husband – a Hawaiian soldier – had been charged with her murder. Her body had not been found. Another First Nations woman killed. It was devastating.

In one of my meetings a few days later, we spoke about missing and murdered Indigenous women, including this young woman. The community is heartbroken. I learned that 33% of Hawai'i is occupied by the military, resulting in high demand for sex workers. It's shocking to see such violence in such a stunning place, where so many people come for holidays. As I know from my own work, the prevalence of violence against First Nations women has little to do with location.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) upholds tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), which grants Māori the right to manage their own affairs, including health, education, and other social services, in a way that reflects their culture and values. The Treaty outlines the government's obligation to actively protect Māori interests and ensure equitable outcomes for Māori. By honouring these principles, the New Zealand Government is expected to work in partnership with Māori to design and deliver healthcare services that meet their needs and respect their sovereignty.

At the time of my visit, the disestablishment of the Māori Health Authority¹⁷ had many Māori concerned about this loss of autonomy and resources, affecting their ability to shape and deliver Māori healthcare on cultural terms. We witnessed the strength of the Māori people who are advocating strongly through protests, lobbying and legal challenges to ensure the current government does not continue to erode the rights enshrined in the Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi).

While I've spent time in Aotearoa New Zealand before, it was so special to have this time to meet and learn from so many First Nations and family violence organisations across the country who – like Djirra – are working tirelessly for the health, safety, and strength of their communities. I was also fortunate to be joined on this leg of the trip by Kelly Faldon, Taungurung woman and Djirra's Manager of Community Engagement.

These insights and advocacy all deepened my resolve to continue fighting for Aboriginal women's rights in this country, to stop our lives being used as a political football, and to ensure investment in our self-determined solutions.

First Nations sisters

I had so many connections and meaningful conversations with strong and influential First Nations women – such powerful voices! The peer learning and mutual support was incredible, and at times nearly brought me to tears. I was taken aback by the similarities in our cultural values and by our shared experiences as First Nations women, public facing advocates and organisational leaders.

Allison Fisher – from the community of Wikwemikong on Manitoulin Island in Turtle Island Canada – immediately captured my heart. Allison and I share many similarities – she has been Executive Director of Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health for 26 years and is a founding member of the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition. Allison gave me a personalised tour of the





Allison Fisher (Left), Executive Director, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Ottawa, with Antoinette.

Wabano Centre, where culture infused everything I saw and felt. I held on to every word as she explained the cultural significance of this special place. I could sense from her stories how hard she had to work to bring it into fruition, welcoming others to step up in the work to make this happen.

The leadership of Mary Daoust, Co-Chair of the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition and Executive Director of Minwaashin Lodge, is characterised by her commitment to collaborative approaches, engaging with everyone she needs to – to drive change. She has had an instrumental role in ensuring that mainstream family violence coalitions include Aboriginal women's voices – as decision makers. This reminds me of our work at Djirra where we have to tailor our advocacy voice to different audiences and purposes – in the legal sector, the family violence sector, and as an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

The National Women's Association of Canada, under the leadership of President McBride, is itself a powerful coalition representing Indigenous women, girls, Two Spirit, transgender and gender diverse people. President McBride is an Algonquin leader and Elder from Timiskaming First Nation. She draws on the Seven Grandmother Teachings in her leadership – love, truth, bravery, humility, wisdom, honesty, and respect. When she showed me through the Grandmother Moon Room, she shared its themes of stories and connection, including her stories as a grandmother of four. Culture gives us strength and President McBride too has a strong and powerful voice. One of her goals as President is to ensure that the recommendations of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry are enacted in full.¹⁸

These connections with my First Nations sisters extended into the later stages of the journey. Following Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, described above, I met with Puni Jackson, leader of Ho'oulu 'Āina in Hawai'i. Puni is herself a respected practitioner of lā'au lāpa'au medicine and other Native Hawaiian healing arts, and an accomplished artist.

In Aotearoa New Zealand I was invited to family dinner with Emma Rawson Te Patu, along with her equally impressive husband Adrian Te Patu who is a board member of the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, and their children. Emma is the new Māori President of the World Federation of Public Health Organisations and the first Indigenous woman to hold this position. She is committed to decolonising public health globally, which means doing things differently to how they have been done. This is so exciting to me in terms of the possibilities for First Nations women, and deeply inspiring on a personal level. We talked about the death of the Māori King, which happened while I was there, and I was struck by the pride in this royal line and the incoming Māori Queen.

As Chief Executive of He Waka Tapu, a holistic health service in Christchurch, Jackie Burrows has been very vocal about her concerns regarding the government's health platform and the impacts on Māori services. She warns such policies could reverse decades of efforts to improve Māori health outcomes and calls for a collaborative approach that respects and incorporates Māori knowledge and practices into the broader health system. Jackie holds a huge vision for He Waka Tapu and shared some stories of more modest beginnings.

These connections were very moving for me – finding new peers with whom I had so much in common. Most of us have been around for a very long time. We spoke about how the achievements that we are known for today have required us to stay in the game through so many years and challenges, to stand in rooms we didn't always want to stand in, and to talk to people we didn't always want to talk to. This is often a hidden price, and I don't get to talk about it much. The opportunity to be with others who understand this so personally is an experience I will never forget.



From left: Mary Daoust, Executive Director, Minwaashin Lodge, Ottawa, and staff with Antoinette.



President Carol McBride, Native Women's Association of Canada, Quebec (left) with Antoinette.



(Left to right)
Adrian Te Patu,
Board Member,
Mental Health
Foundation NZ,
Emma Rawson Te
Patu, President -
World
Federation of Public
Health Associations,
Kelly Faldon, Djirra,
and Antoinette.



Wider voices and inspirations

I had the privilege of witnessing the remarkable work of so many other advocates, both in the public eye and behind the scenes, whose efforts and achievements are far too many to fully acknowledge. By recognising this, I hope to honour each individual I encountered along this journey, as well as the passion and commitment of the teams – and often entire communities – that supported them. In this reflection, I will highlight a few examples to illustrate the power of our voices and actions, both individually and collectively.

Judge Judy Kluger, CEO at Sanctuary for Families since 2014, has received widespread recognition and awards for her work, which includes 25 years as a Judge in New York and – as Chief of Policy and Planning – oversight of 300 problem-solving courts. My conversation with her and Simone Monasebian, Chief Program Officer, was truly enriching, and it was easy to see how Sanctuary for Families has benefited from her experience working with survivors through the courts. While nearly doubling the agency's budget, she launched new legal and clinical programs and introduced the first work co-op initiative for current and former clients.

Nathanial Fields, CEO of the Urban Resource Institute (URI), who gathered a team of eight for our meeting, seems a natural collaborator who respects how much we learn from others. Under his leadership he has nearly tripled the budget and URI is now the largest provider of domestic violence shelters in the country, with a focus on communities of colour and other under-served populations. He recently secured the first loan granted to a not-for-profit agency to build their own shelter facility in Harlem, with apartments and extensive on-site services for up to 84 families experiencing homelessness, and a different grant to build another 84 affordable and supported housing units next door. His leadership team is equally impressive, with many notable women of colour making a mark and holding their own in the media.

Coalitions and collaborations

In every place, and through every agency I visited, coalitions have played a vital role in amplifying the voices of marginalised communities, advocating for policy change, and developing effective programs to address systemic issues.

Through its participation in national and international campaigns and coalitions, NWAC has influenced the launch of national inquiries into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Turtle Island Canada. Their coalition-building approach has strengthened the advocacy landscape and led to heightened public awareness and governmental commitments aimed at improving safety and support for Indigenous women. This includes the new Safe Passage Women's Safety Council, established in 2023 and comprised of representatives from NWAC's member associations.

During my time in Hawai'i, I was fortunate enough to visit healing centres and refuges operated by members of the Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. By bringing together diverse organisations and stakeholders, this coalition successfully lobbied for state legislation that enhanced protections for domestic violence survivors and secured increased funding for services.

Advocacy for the introduction of Integrated Domestic Violence Courts in New York is a testament to the power of coalition work. Led by the Centre for Justice Innovation, this initiative has improved collaboration between civil and criminal justice systems, ultimately resulting in better outcomes for survivors of domestic violence. By leveraging research and evidence, the Centre's coalitions have influenced policy discussions and led the adoption of innovative justice practices. The Urban Resource Institute's coalition-building efforts emphasise grassroots organising, which has empowered local communities to advocate for their needs. This has resulted in important policy reforms and expanded services that prioritise equity and accessibility for communities of colour.



Staff of the Eastern
Refuge Society,
Auckland, with
Kelly Faldon, Djirra
(far-right) and
Antoinette.



Judge Judy Kluger, CEO, Sanctuary for Families, New York City, with Antoinette.



Staff of the Urban Resource Institute, New York City, with Antoinette.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, He Waka Tapu's coalition work has influenced the design and funding of family violence programs that respect and incorporate Māori cultural practices. Drawing on partnerships with government and community organisations, He Waka Tapu has played a pivotal role in advancing health policies that promote whānau (family) wellbeing and integrate Māori perspectives into government initiatives.

In the current climate, where government policy and funding for bicultural approaches are at risk, the Māori leaders have had to step up in a different way, through coalitions coming together around the urgency and implications of this issue. This work is a reminder that coalitions don't always have to be formal and can be just as powerful when they are a group of people and/or agencies working together in response to emerging issues. It is frustrating, of course, that the fight is never over, and that as First Nations peoples there always seems to be something else around the corner.

These coalitions highlight the importance of collaboration in advocacy efforts. By working together, these agencies and individuals have achieved significant policy changes, improved access to services, and fostered community engagement, ultimately contributing to the wellbeing and empowerment of First Nations women and communities.

First Nations women deliver

In reflecting on the powerful voices of the people and agencies I met on this journey, I noticed many similarities with how we do business at Djirra, including:

- advocacy coalitions formed across multiple sectors – to create a united front against family violence, amplifying voices and leveraging resources for impactful change
- connections to cultural ways of knowing and doing – integrating cultural practices and the wisdom of Elders informs our work and strengthens our community engagement and effectiveness in addressing family violence

- a mix of media and social media campaigns – to raise awareness about family violence and other aspects of our work, mobilising support and highlighting critical issues
- fundraising – strong fundraising efforts such as celebration galas help to raise awareness, garner support, generate revenue – which supports self-determination.

I started to think more about the extent of our shared histories and the present-day impacts, including the impacts of assimilation and cultural genocide through the removal of children and the shocking disregard of Missing and Murdered First Nations women. I can see opportunities for international policy collaborations to address violence against First Nations women, benefiting communities through increased visibility and effective strategies.

Djirra is pushing for a strong focus on First Nations women at the 2026 Women Deliver Global Conference. My intervention at the July 2023 Women Deliver Conference in Rwanda was a critical step towards this, as I spoke about the unique challenges that Aboriginal women face in the context of family violence. I also highlighted our people's struggle for recognition within our own country, and the Voice to Parliament Referendum occurring in October 2023, making the conference a timely opportunity for these critical discussions.

Many attendees were unaware of the issues impacting our women, underscoring the need for First Nations women's voices to be amplified on the global stage.

Expanding our global presence and advocacy will ensure family violence becomes a priority on the world stage. I am excited by the campaigns and achievements of my peers, such as President McBride and Emma Rawson Te Patu, in the international arena. It shows me that new pathways are opening for us as First Nations women to come together and speak up.

There may be opportunities for international staff and skill exchanges with some of the agencies I visited. I would love to send more Aboriginal women on exchanges, building the capacity of our future leaders, here at Djirra and more broadly, while strengthening relationships with our First Nations sisters.

In Appendix Two – Key Advocacy Achievements and Strategies by Agency I set out some of the advocacy achievements and strategies for the agencies I visited. Given the recent release of Australia's Final Report into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children, I am keen to do some more thinking about advocacy programs in this area, inspired perhaps by the following programs at NWAC:

- Safe Passage website – This platform tracks cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, transgender, gender-diverse, and Two-Spirit people, monitors ongoing safety concerns, provides safety resources, educates the public and media, and commemorates and honours stolen loved ones
- Red Dress Day – raises awareness about violence against Indigenous women through public displays, serving as a reminder of the lives lost and the ongoing struggle for justice – there are also regular vigils to honour those lost to violence, providing a space for communities to reflect, advocate for change, and support affected families.

In the section, Self-determined, Holistic Services and Solutions, I highlight other programs I could consider, as well as some of the differences between Djirra and the agencies I visited. I focus on social enterprise and economic empowerment programs as they can support our collective voice as First Nations women – our capacity to speak out – and help ensure we are not too busy fighting for survival. Government must continue to provide funding for





our solutions, policy, and community and cultural knowledge, but we still need to generate income to make sure our contributions are resourced when it matters. It's not just about what we say, but what we have capacity to do – on our own terms.

Looking ahead, Djirra now has relationships – and in some cases invitations to return – with the agencies I visited, many of whom share my interest in collaborating on international advocacy. As steadfast advocates and committed change-makers, we know that strengthening global networks can drive meaningful change in addressing violence against our communities. I hope you can hear the power in our voices.

NOTES

16 The Senate, Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee (August 2024), *Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children Final Report* https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/FirstNationswomenchildren/Report

17 Ministry of Health NZ, *Information release Cabinet and briefing material: Disestablishment of the Māori Health Authority – Next Steps on Māori health* (12 August 2024). Published at: Cabinet and briefing material: [Disestablishment of the Māori Health Authority – Next Steps on Māori health](#) | Ministry of Health NZ

18 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* Published at: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>.

Conclusions and recommendations



A legacy in motion. Gathering and weaving together the messages and shared experiences from every path travelled, carrying them home with confidence and belief in my purpose and in the legacy we will create for generations to follow. © Antoinette Braybrook AM



With over 22 years' experience working at the frontline of Aboriginal women's safety, I am incredibly proud of Djirra's achievements and am inspired by the resilience and strength of the women we work with and for. Together, we are breaking cycles of violence, reclaiming our stories, and building a future where Aboriginal women determine our own lives – Aboriginal women's self-determination in action.

This Fellowship has profoundly refined and strengthened my vision for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre. The invaluable insights I gained from the incredible First Nations women, and the broad range of other amazing people and organisations I visited, has sparked many new concepts and designs which will inform our strategic planning to position our Centre as not only a beacon of hope, but also innovation and collaboration.

At a practical level, Djirra's plans for regional expansion through an expanded service model will rely on an operational Centre on the scale envisaged for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre. We will also expand the suite of services and enterprises available on-site, including some of the ideas presented above.

The symbolic aspects are just as vital.¹⁹ More than ever, my vision is to develop Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre to be a significant cultural landmark – a space through which there is an opportunity to come together and look forward towards a future where we are all involved and have done everything within our means to embed Aboriginal women's self-determination.

I take this opportunity to invite the readers to be a part of our story and journey, to accept this invitation and to find your unique way to supporting us to realise our goal. All levels of government must support Djirra to realise our vision. The Victorian Government must consider opportunities presented by the Statewide Treaty Negotiations. We invite Local Government and others to support Djirra to find the land – country – on which we can best flourish. I am inviting philanthropic support, donors, and other change-makers who know that the best way forward from here is together, with sense of ownership, collective responsibility, and action.

Recommendation 1 – Joint funding for the establishment and ongoing operational costs of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

That all levels of government, Commonwealth, Victorian and Local, commit to funding the establishment and ongoing operational costs of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, in partnership with philanthropists and other funders. Securing diverse funding sources is essential for reducing the risks associated with short-term funding cycles and guaranteeing the Centre's sustainability as a vital, culturally safe space for Aboriginal women.

Recommendation 2 – Funding must allow the development of strong cultural components.

That this funding fully supports the integration of strong cultural components within Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, including involvement of Elders, the incorporation of traditional knowledge and spatial/visual elements, and the use of specialist design and consultation processes that reflect our cultural values and heritage.

Recommendation 3 - Support for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre in Victoria's Statewide Treaty Negotiations.

That the First Peoples' Assembly Victoria, as part of the Victorian Statewide Treaty Negotiations, support and advocate for the establishment of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre as a significant cultural landmark that holds space for Aboriginal women's voices and aspirations, and extends the facilities needed for Aboriginal women experiencing family and sexual violence in Victoria.

Recommendation 4 - Explore options for expanding services and programs in the development of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

That Djirra integrates best practice insights gained from the Churchill Fellowship in relation to service and program expansion, partnerships, and diverse funding models. This includes exploring a self-determined social enterprise model, economic empowerment programs and co-location with other relevant organisations.

Recommendation 5 - That Djirra continues to refine our integrated service delivery model to ensure Aboriginal women's rights are protected and preserved.

That Djirra draws on learnings from the Churchill Fellowship when developing our new integrated service delivery model. This will ensure Aboriginal women experience a more streamlined journey through Djirra, whilst also empowering them to make informed choices and protecting their right to confidentiality.

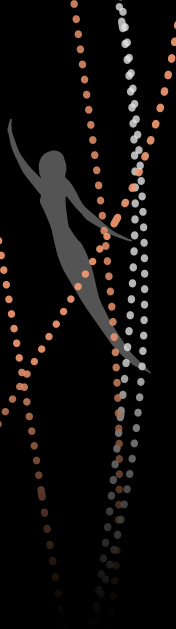
Recommendation 6 - Expand Djirra's opportunities for advocacy and collaboration.

That Djirra explores opportunities to strengthen advocacy efforts both nationally and internationally, develop new collaborations, and build partnerships that align with Djirra's vision for the Aboriginal Women's Centre.

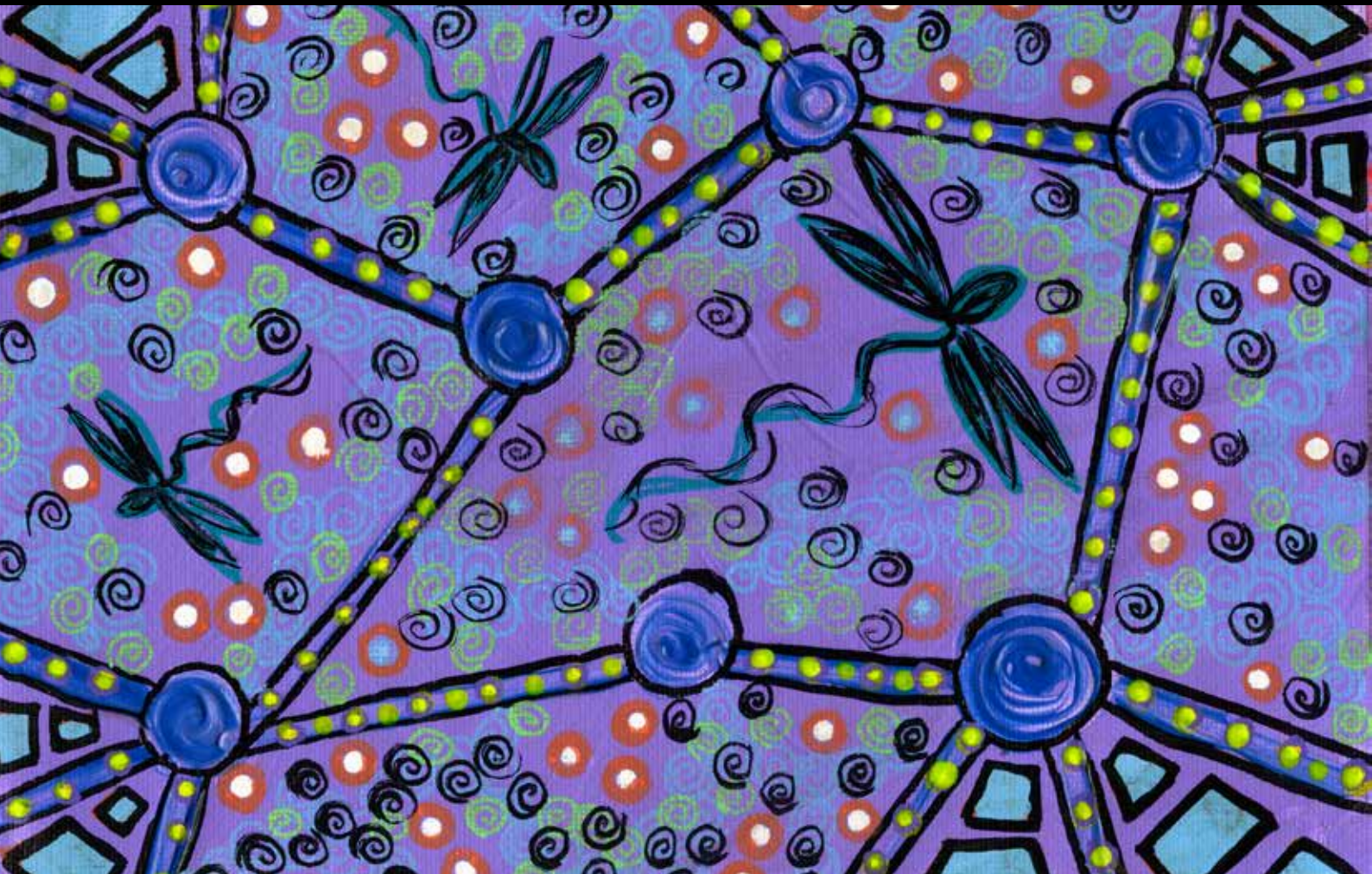
NOTES

19 The Senate Inquiry calls for a culturally appropriate and nationally significant way in which to recognise and remember the First Nations women and children who have been murdered or disappeared. Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee (August 2024) *Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children*, Rec 1. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/FirstNationswomenchildren/Report





Dissemination and implementation



Boundless Opportunities. Bringing it home, weaving it all together – ideas emerge, fueling boundless opportunities to explore. © Antoinette Braybrook AM

The publication of this report is an opportunity to engage potential funders (across all sectors), political and other advocates, as well as government agencies, peak bodies, and other service providers who are on board to work with us towards resource development, partnerships, service improvement, and best practice in the establishment of Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre.

We will advocate to, and engage with Commonwealth, Victorian and Local Governments in contributing to the capital fundraising campaign, with a focus on securing commitments through Victorian State Budgets and election manifesto commitments for major parties for upcoming State and Federal elections.

To achieve this, internally at Djirra these findings will inform the drafting of a Feasibility Study for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre, as well as our strategic and operational planning and development of a Business Case. Djirra will continue to advocate with the Victorian Government in the next State budget cycle and strengthen the support for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre through relevant Aboriginal Governance Partnership Forums such as Dhelk Dja, the Aboriginal Justice Forum and Closing the Gap.

Leadership by Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women's ownership of, and control over, decision making is crucial, which means harnessing the expertise and leadership of Aboriginal women working in Djirra through these and other processes.

As this report could not cover everything I learned through this process, I am capturing other relevant information in supplementary materials. These materials will be used where most relevant, which may include for example:

- formal briefings and campaign presentations with Board, executive and staff
- development of other materials to secure funding and other resources, such as a Donor Feasibility Study, review of our gift recognition policies and processes, bespoke gift proposals and a Major Donor and Bequest Program
- development of Djirra's service models and/or program offerings
- development of Djirra's advocacy and communications strategies, including opportunities to expand our international reach.

The report will be shared directly with:

- relevant State and Commonwealth Ministers and Government Departments
- relevant Local Government Councillors and Executive in the Cities of Yarra, Darebin, Merri-bek and Melbourne
- philanthropists, donors and other potential supporters
- First Peoples Assembly and Treaty Working Groups - To demonstrate the role of the Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre in Treaty readiness and situate the Aboriginal Women's Centre within the path of Treaty
- Aboriginal Justice Caucus and Dhelk Dja Caucus
- Traditional Owner groups
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation sector partners
- relevant peak bodies
- Djirra's Board, Djirra Keepers, and staff.





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I reviewed websites from each agency in preparation for my application and each visit, and to confirm many of the details in the development of this report, of which there are too many to list as individual references here.



Tree of Life. Inspired by the beautiful swirls on the trunk of the tree and the secrets it holds and stories it tells. The flowers, the raindrops and the golden sun beaming on its side while Dragonfly dances. © Antoinette Braybrook AM

Appendices

Appendix one – overview of projects and programs by agency

Agencies with cultural centres and relevant capital projects

Agency/service	Overview of programs	Cultural centre/capital project	Cultural elements and design	Potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre
Blackfeet Reservation	Includes Blackfeet Community Hospital, several schools, a housing authority, job placement and training programs, natural resource management, cultural tours and programs and the Blackfeet Tribal Court with legal services and adjudication. Other services include family support and domestic violence programs (with counselling, advocacy and emergency shelter services) and a treatment centre for people dealing with substance misuse and related issues.	The Blackfeet Cultural Welcome Center was completed in 2017. It aimed to create a space that honours the rich cultural heritage of the Blackfeet National while blending modern architectural elements with traditional cultural significance. It was designed by the New Fire Native Design Group and funded through federal grants, tribal funds and private donations.	The exterior of the building was designed to mirror the mountains surrounding the reservation, using materials from traditional building practices. The layout was designed to facilitate community gatherings and cultural events, using open spaces to encourage interaction and connection. It features traditional artwork, symbols and motifs inspired by culture and has dedicated spaces for ceremonies and other cultural practices.	Expanding ideas and strategies for cultural identity design in the Aboriginal Women's Centre, including engagement of specialist cultural architects.
He Waka Tapu	Includes the Te Aranga Health Clinic Primary Health Clinic, as well as support services for sexual health, mental health, addiction support, reintegration and family violence prevention. Also operate a community gym and community garden which provides free food to families in need. Programs guided by Te Ao Māori principles and aim to support holistic wellbeing of individuals and families.	Achieved full ownership of the Te Aranga Health Clinic in Christchurch in 2022. It cost around \$NZ1.1 million with funding by Better Health Group, following their involvement as a partner in the initial establishment of the clinic.	While these details for the clinic itself are not available, the <u>Te Aranga Cultural Design Principles</u> were developed in 2005, and are widely used to ensure the built environment reflects Māori cultural values and practices.	Explore applications of the Te Aranga Design Principles and potential relevance to Djirra's cultural context. Could review programs – such as community garden, violence prevention programs, wellbeing groups and holistic health models – for relevance to the Aboriginal Women's Centre.

Agency/service	Overview of programs	Cultural centre/capital project	Cultural elements and design	Potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre
Ho'oulu 'Āina	A 100-acre nature preserve managed by Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services (KKV). Programs are aimed at reconnecting people in reciprocal relationship with the land, cultural regeneration and healing, land regeneration, community engagement, education and holistic health.	In 2005, KKV was granted a 20-year lease from the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources to steward and sustainably develop this land. The decision to preserve it as a public resource was made earlier, to honour its historical significance and provide a space for community vitality and cultural education. It is an ongoing project with new buildings and facilities.	Site includes traditional Lo'i (taro patches) native plant gardens, and spaces for cultural education and ceremonies. Buildings reflect traditional Hawaiian architecture, using natural materials and construction methods. The site is designed as a living classroom, with cultural education integrated into the overall design and function.	Could look further into land-based healing and community engagement models for integrating into Aboriginal Women's Centre's cultural programs. May also consider collaborations with educational institutions.
Maata Waka and Ngā Hau e Whā National Marae	Maata Waka provides a range of services on-site, including social services, youth services, education and training, creative arts, housing, business development (economic empowerment), and community development cultural programs.	Maata Waka is responsible for and operates from the Ngā Hau e Whā National Marae in Christchurch, which was opened in 1990. The site was set aside by the Christchurch City Council for this purpose in 1977, with construction starting in 1981. The estimated total cost was up to \$NZ1.2 million. There were delays due to residential complaints and a shortfall in project funds, with the latter resulting in a transfer of the land to the New Zealand Government. ²⁰	Features numerous cultural design elements including a carved entrance gateway depicting the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, and other symbolic carving, a Wharenuī (meeting house) and Whare Wānanga (learning house), a traditional palisade and use of Māori language and symbols throughout. As well as reflecting Māori cultural heritage and history, these elements also speak to the intentions and purpose of the Marae.	Serves as a powerful example of how cultural symbolism in the design and purpose of a building can serve as a cultural landmark that brings people together in a shared vision for the future, while also facilitating a range of service delivery functions.



Agencies with cultural centres and relevant capital projects *continued*

Agency/service	Overview of programs	Cultural centre/capital project	Cultural elements and design	Potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre
Minwaashin Lodge	Provides emergency shelter, individual/group counselling, and advocacy for Indigenous women. Have a range of other family violence services, cultural support programs, children's Programs and trafficking programs. Has an economic empowerment program called 'Courage to Soar'.	Minwaashin has recently announced it has secured land and funding for a 30-bed, culturally grounded shelter which will offer wrap-around supports specifically for Inuit women and their children fleeing violence.	The lodge integrates Indigenous cultural practices and traditional healing methods into its program and design, fostering a safe environment for healing.	Explore culturally informed support models and healing programs for Aboriginal Women's Centre's development. Have requested more information about Minwaashin engagement of the City of Ottawa and the status of this project.
Native Hawaiian Traditional Healing Centre	Promotes traditional Hawaiian healing and cultural education, practices and traditions. It is part of an integrated health model through co-location with a primary care clinic and other health services through the overarching Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Centre. Traditional practices include Lomilomi (Hawaiian massage therapy), Laau Lapaau (herbal medicine), Laau Kahea (spiritual healing), and Hooponopono (conflict resolution).	Building or refurbishment details are not readily available, but the centre is part of a cluster of buildings on the Wainae campus of the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Centre. This campus opened in 1972. Another feature of this larger campus is Hā Ola Mau which includes a series of walking trails and through which visitors can undertake tours, classes, and other cultural experiences.	The Healing Centre operates under Papa Ola Lōkahi, a partner organisation set up to support Native Hawaiian healing modalities. This work is guided by kupuna (Elders and master practitioners) through Kupuna Councils. Hā Ola Mau is designed with the Healing Centre's Kapuna Council to reflect the beauty of the natural landscape and history, values and vision for health and wellness in Hawai'i. The walking trails are filled with shade trees, flower gardens, native plants and foliage, sanctuaries, custom artwork and ocean views.	Explore Hā Ola Mau as a social enterprise model, as it offers tours and classes and contributes to sustainability. The Ka'ahaaina Café appears to be another social enterprise, including catering for meetings and events, combined with rental of the health centre's Dining Pavillion. Could explore the possibility of traditional healing modalities in holistic service delivery for Aboriginal Women's Centre.

Agency/service	Overview of programs	Cultural centre/capital project	Cultural elements and design	Potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre
Native Women's Association of Canada - Social and Cultural Innovation Centre	The Social and Cultural Innovation Centre is home to a range of programs and supports for Indigenous women and gender diverse people, youth-specific programs and education, cultural programming, and greater supports for survivors and families of MMIWG. NWAC also has a major role in policy and advocacy and other awareness raising activities. Has launched multiple social enterprises, such as: Artisanelle, an online boutique that provides a platform and incubator for Indigenous creators; Café Bouleau, offering culturally inspired foods and catering; and facility rental. A recent loss of apprenticeship funding has been very impactful on administrative/operational funds overall.	Purchased the building in 2022 for C\$5.8 million, funded by government grants and private donations. The Resiliency Centre sits within the Social and Cultural Innovation Centre as a collection of culturally inspired rooms, led by Indigenous women, to host workshops, conduct meetings and share traditional teachings. Also have spaces for exhibitions and cultural displays.	The building is designed to symbolise empowerment, reflecting the voices and stories of Indigenous women, and the design throughout incorporates symbols and motifs that represent the strength, resilience and diversity of Indigenous women. Each room in the Resiliency Centre is designed with cultural purpose, including the Cedar Room, First Nations Room, Metis Room and Inuit Rooms, Grandmother Moon Room, Medicine Baths and Children's Room, and a Rooftop Garden that can host both ceremonies and meetings. The Rooftop Garden features a commemoration of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, Two Spirit and gender diverse people.	Expanding ideas and strategies for cultural identity design in the Aboriginal Women's Centre. Interested in social enterprise models and revenue from rentals of the culturally themed rooms. NWAC's programming and advocacy are both extensive, with a wide range of highly relevant opportunities to inform the Aboriginal Women's Centre's policy, project, and community engagement work, not limited to these examples and others mentioned in the report above.





Agencies with cultural centres and relevant capital projects *continued*

Agency/service	Overview of programs	Cultural centre/capital project	Cultural elements and design	Potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health	Offers primary and integrated health care, cultural programming, and wellness activities for Indigenous peoples in Ottawa, and a commitment to using Indigenous healing practices in health services. Wabano Fine Chocolates is a social enterprise and is inspired by Indigenous culture and ingredients. Other social enterprises include facility rentals, a gift shop, fee-based wellness services, and are at times linked to empowerment and entrepreneurial goals, such as beading workshops.	Achieved significant capital expansion with a new 40,000 square-foot building, completed in 2020, costing C\$15 million, funded through government grants and private donations. This took around 5 years, with phased development allowing parts of the facility to become operational during construction.	The centre features Indigenous art, installations and exhibition spaces, culturally themed rooms and gathering spaces, smudging rooms and gardens with medicinal plants. The cultural elements were a product of extensive consultations with the Indigenous community, including Elders, focus groups and community meetings, and collaboration with Indigenous architects, designers and cultural experts to ensure cultural authenticity in design.	Expanding ideas and strategies for cultural identity consultation and design in the Aboriginal Women's Centre. Explore integration of traditional healing and holistic health approaches in the Aboriginal Women's Centre's service delivery.

Other agency visits

Agency/service	Most relevant programs and initiatives	Potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre
Centre for Justice Innovation (CJI)	A community justice organisation that centres safety and racial justice in partnership with communities, courts and the people most impacted. Founded as a public/private partnership between the New York State Unified Court System and the Fund for the City of New York. Its initiatives include the Midtown Community Court and the Red Hook Community Justice (see below for details on both).	Centre for Justice Innovation also Family Drug and Alcohol Courts designed to provide a supportive, non-adversarial environment for families dealing with substance misuse issues, which brings them into contact with child protection issues. Lawyers here are part of a multidisciplinary team which includes collaboration with a range of mandated reporters (e.g. social workers). They use information barriers to protect legal privilege.
CJI - Midtown Community Court	One of the first problem-solving courts in the U.S. Includes the Integrated Domestic Violence Court, which uses collaboration between Criminal and Civil Courts, ensuring cases are heard by a single Judge. This holistic approach considers wider issues impacting the parties/family, connects victim/survivors with essential services, and monitors compliance with orders.	Interested in this model of collaboration between different court systems as there may be aspects to advocate for locally. You can Request the domestic violence court planning toolkit for practical step-by-step instructions on how to plan, implement, or enhance a domestic violence court and/or dedicated domestic violence docket. Also have mentor courts to support the establishment of this model nationally in the U.S.
CJI - Red Hook Community Justice Centre	The first multi-jurisdictional community court in the U.S. Handles cases that would typically go to Civil, Family, and Criminal Courts in one place. Uses holistic and restorative justice approaches, including community service projects, psycho-educational groups, long-term treatment programs, a youth court and a housing resource centre for residents dealing with housing court cases.	As above, interested in this model as there may be aspects to advocate for locally. Aligns with Djirra's holistic approach and shares our commitment to community engagement and empowerment. The Peacemaking Program may have commonalities with Koori Court - inspired by Native American approaches to justice, with a focus on healing and restoration, while incorporating cultural values and practices of participants.
Eastern Refuge Society	A member of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, which has 40 members nationally. Provides Crisis Accommodation and Transitional Housing, Advocacy incl. Legal Advocacy and Māori advocates, Counselling, Education and Training, Community Outreach.	Could warrant some exploration of collaboration with Māori approaches, internally and externally. For example, they use a model of 'parallel development' of Māori programs. Has some interesting fundraising programs such as 'Share my Super.' Could also investigate legal advocacy programs for relevance to Djirra.



Other agency visits *continued*

Agency/service	Most relevant programs and initiatives	Potential insights for Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre
Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence	A collective voice of at least 20 domestic violence agencies and programs. Members include various community-based organizations, service providers, advocates, and individuals committed to ending domestic violence and supporting survivors. Best known for Public Policy Advocacy, Training and Capacity Building, Partnerships and Research.	Investigate public policy advocacy and community partnership approaches for strengthening Aboriginal Women's Centre's public impact. Research work includes <i>Scars on the Heart: Barriers to Safety for Survivors of Domestic Violence</i> . Are there data questions we could ask? Member Pouhana O Nā Wāhine is a domestic violence resource centre that is run by Native Hawaiian women.
Heretaunga Women's Centre	Provide a Legal Clinic, Advocacy, Mentoring, Health and Wellbeing Programs (including alternative therapies, creative and therapeutic arts workshops). Includes Art in the Hallways program, and facility hire. They do not receive government funding for services but rely on community funding and donations, including through fundraising events and charitable trusts.	Explore advocacy and health/wellbeing programs for integration into Aboriginal Women's Centre's holistic support services. A wide range of workshops, including creative and therapeutic arts workshops, that could prompt ideas for the Aboriginal Women's Centre. The mentorship programs may be of interest, including SuperGrans to facilitate the active involvement of Elders.
Sanctuary for Families	Operates out of 11 locations in New York. Its flagship programs include a Legal Center, Economic Empowerment Program, Transitional Shelter and Clinical Support.	Explore Economic Empowerment model and fundraising strategies for the Aboriginal Women's Centre. The legal centre shares the same challenges re risks to legal privilege under a holistic model.
Urban Resource Institute	Services for domestic violence survivors and homeless families, including shelter and holistic support to domestic violence survivors, People and Animals Living Safely, Economic Empowerment Services, the Early Relationship Abuse Prevention Program, and Transitional Housing. Have secured funding for large capital projects to provide affordable and quality housing to families.	Has had very successful partnership/fundraising strategies, including some initiatives not dissimilar to Djirra Ambassadors - e.g. see Friends of URI and the Blueprint for Change Forum. Review relevance of People and Animals Living Safely Program and Economic Empowerment Services.
Women's Fund of Hawai'i	Provides grants to support community level programs for women and girls, including a range of social enterprises. Also provide education and advocacy and other empowerment strategies and an online market as a social enterprise.	Consider grant and economic support models for women's programs. Review projects and social enterprises they have funded for relevance. Consider partnership/fundraising strategies as they have attracted high level individuals and corporate sponsors.
YWCA Billings	Have a legal clinic and case management, including targeted services for First Nations communities. This includes the 'Purse a-Palooza' program which has similarities to Djirra's Sisters Day Out.	May warrant following up to ask how they manage information sharing.

Appendix two – key advocacy achievements and strategies by agency

Agency/service	Public advocacy focus	Major achievements	How they did this
Centre for Justice Innovation	Advocates for reform through policy proposals that promote Integrated Domestic Violence Courts and collaboration between civil and criminal systems.	Influenced the creation/expansion of Integrated Domestic Violence Courts, impacting justice policies.	Research and evidence-based advocacy, policy briefings, and collaboration with government.
Eastern Refuge Society	Including involvement in National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, advocates for stronger legal protections for domestic violence survivors, actively engaging in government consultations and pushing for policy changes.	Played a key role in shaping domestic violence legislation and improving legal protections for survivors.	Direct lobbying, government submissions, and participation in national policy forums.
He Waka Tapu	Advocates for bicultural approaches in government health policies, particularly focused on family violence prevention and whānau wellbeing.	Helped integrate bicultural models into health policies, influencing government-funded family violence programs.	Community engagement, partnerships with government, and delivering cultural competency training to officials.
Heretaunga Women's Centre	Advocates for policy reform to improve access to women's health services and protections against domestic violence, contributing to local and national consultations.	Increased access to services through policy advocacy for regional women, influencing health policy reforms.	Grassroots advocacy, community organising, and participation in local government consultations.
Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence	Advocates for statewide domestic violence policy reforms, focusing on prevention, training, and legal support services for survivors.	Influenced state legislation to strengthen domestic violence protections and secured increased funding for services.	Coalition-building, state-level lobbying, and delivering evidence-based policy recommendations.
Ho'oulu 'Āina	Advocates for policies that support Indigenous land rights, sustainable agriculture, and cultural restoration through government partnerships and funding initiatives.	Secured government support for land restoration and cultural preservation programs through policy and advocacy.	Collaboration with policymakers, community-led initiatives, and public awareness campaigns.
Maata Waka	Advocates for Māori health policies, including access to culturally appropriate services and legal rights, working closely with local government.	Influenced regional policy to improve access to service funding and healthcare for Māori.	Partnerships with local government, policy papers, and engagement in public forums.



Appendix two *continued*

Agency/service	Public advocacy focus	Major achievements	How they did this
Minwaashin Lodge	Advocates for government policies that address the safety and rights of Indigenous women, particularly regarding violence against women and intergenerational trauma.	Contributed to national policy discussions on Indigenous women's safety, shaping VAW strategies and funding priorities.	Survivor-led advocacy, direct government lobbying, and participation in national policy consultations.
Native Hawaiian Traditional Healing Centre	Advocates for the inclusion of traditional healing in national health policies, promoting cultural education and Indigenous knowledge in healthcare.	Influenced healthcare policies to incorporate traditional healing practices and funding for cultural health services.	Cultural diplomacy, engagement with health officials, and traditional knowledge promotion.
Native Women's Association of Canada	Advocates for comprehensive national policies on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, pushing for policy change and national inquiries.	Key player in influencing the launch of the MMIWG inquiry and resulting commitments to policy reforms.	National campaigns, participation in national inquiries, and survivor-focused testimonies.
Sanctuary for Families	Advocates for domestic violence and human trafficking reforms at the federal, state, and local levels, focusing on legal protections and survivors' rights.	Played a key role in strengthening New York State's legal protections for survivors of domestic violence and trafficking.	Direct legal advocacy, policy lobbying, and coalition-building with lawmakers and survivor groups.
Urban Resource Institute	Advocates for equitable domestic violence policies, with a focus on communities of colour, and pushes for early intervention and support services.	Influenced policy reforms that expanded domestic violence services and shelter access for underserved communities.	Grassroots organising, policy recommendations, and partnership with local agencies.
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health	Advocates for Indigenous healthcare policies that integrate traditional healing with modern medicine, influencing national healthcare frameworks.	Secured policy support and funding for Indigenous healthcare models within Canada's health system.	Policy submissions, advocacy in public health forums, and building relationships with government.
Women's Fund of Hawai'i	Advocates for policies that support economic independence for Native Hawaiian women, focusing on social enterprise and empowerment initiatives.	Influenced local economic policies and secured government support for women's social enterprise programs.	Advocacy through grants, partnership with government, and community-based lobbying.

Appendix three – violence against First Nations women, including missing and murdered women

Issues and government responses	Turtle Island Canada	Turtle Island U.S.	Hawai'i	Aotearoa New Zealand	Australia
Family Violence and Sexual Assault	61% of Indigenous women experience some form of Intimate Partner Violence since the age of 15, while about 4 in 10 Indigenous people experienced sexual or physical violence by an adult before the age of 15. ²¹	84.3% of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime. ²²	Native Hawaiians experience the highest rates of domestic violence, at 30–33% ²³ , while 37% of adults who experience physical violence by an intimate partner are Indigenous (including Native American and Native Hawaiian). ²⁴	Up to 80% of Māori women experience violence in their lifetime, with New Zealand ranked as the worst among OECD developed countries for rates of family violence.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence, 10 times more likely to die from violent assault and 7 times more likely to be murdered than other women. Our women also experience disproportionately higher rates of sexual assault. ²⁵
Government Responses	Canada has implemented a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (2021), focusing on Indigenous women, but there are concerns about the pace and effectiveness of implementation.	The Violence Against Women Act includes provisions for Native women. Since 2013, tribal courts are allowed to prosecute non-Native perpetrators, but enforcement and resources remain inconsistent. The Not Invisible Act and Savanna's Act were passed in 2020, yet challenges persist.	Efforts include local initiatives like the Pu'uhonua program, which integrates cultural practices in healing, but there is a lack of comprehensive federal response specific to Native Hawaiians.	The 2021 National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence was introduced, with a specific focus on Māori. In 2022, an Advisory Group was appointed to ensure the strategy's effectiveness for Māori families.	Following years of advocacy from Djirra and others, in 2022 the Federal Government committed to a dedicated National Plan to End Violence Against First Nations Women and Children, to be released June 2025. Whilst this is a step in the right direction, funding uncertainty continues, and multiple inquiries and recommendations have gone unheeded.



Appendix three *continued*

Issues and government responses	Turtle Island Canada	Turtle Island U.S.	Hawai'i	Aotearoa New Zealand	Australia
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women/ Peoples	Indigenous women are disproportionately represented among the Missing and Murdered Women and Girls in Canada. The 2019 National Inquiry identified systemic racism and violence as key factors. ²⁶	The crisis of Missing and Murdered Peoples is described as a silent genocide. Data from the U.S. Department of Justice shows that Indigenous women are murdered at a rate 10 times higher than the national average and homicide is one of the leading causes of death for young Indigenous women. ²⁷	A report by the Hawai'i State Legislature's Missing and Murdered Native Hawaiian Women and Girls Task Force found that one in four missing girls in Hawai'i are Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian). There are strong links to human trafficking with a recent taskforce showing that 38% of those arrested for soliciting sex from a 13-year-old are active-duty military personnel. ²⁸	The crisis of missing and murdered First Nations women is known to be significant in Aotearoa New Zealand, though data is limited.	At least 315 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have been brutally disappeared or murdered since 2000, however given the inadequate data collection these numbers are likely to be much higher. In August 2024, Australia's national Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children released its Final Report.
Government Responses	The federal government launched a National Action Plan in 2021, but only a small fraction of the 231 recommendations from the MMIWG Inquiry have been fully implemented. Critics argue that more comprehensive and timely actions are needed.	The U.S. government has taken steps, including the creation of the Operation Lady Justice Task Force (2019) and passing the Not Invisible Act (2020) and Savanna's Act (2020), aimed at improving law enforcement responses. However, systemic issues like jurisdictional challenges and under-reporting continue to hinder progress.	The U.S. government only acknowledged the issue in 2022, with local initiatives pushing for better data collection and protection. The role of the military and systemic neglect are areas of ongoing concern. There is also growing advocacy for recognising the unique challenges faced by Native Hawaiians.	While the government has been slow to respond, there are calls for more comprehensive protections. Advocacy from Māori organisations, including the Māori Women's Welfare League, has pushed for better data collection, prevention strategies, and victim support services.	The Senate Inquiry Report has some important and welcome recommendations, but some do not go far enough. There are also concerns the recommendations will not be implemented as the Government is yet to respond.

NOTES

20 Sourced from Wikipedia contributors, "Ngā Hau e Whā National Marae, Christchurch," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, last modified October 11, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ng%C4%81_Hau_e_Wh%C4%81_National_Marae,_Christchurch; Christchurch City Libraries

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28 Cristobal, N. Missing and Murdered Native Hawaiian Women. p. 17.





Djirra's vision is about hope and inspiring pride and recognition in Aboriginal women's self-determination, celebrating our culture and identity. Djirra's Aboriginal Women's Centre will be a gift to the people of Victoria. It will be a place of learning, reflection, and connection, inviting opportunities for all people to engage with and support the rich and beautiful culture and history of Victoria. It is the culmination of more than two decades of Djirra's vision.

Antoinette Braybrook AM
CEO, Djirra

Cover image:

*Dragonfly Dreaming – My Journey –
Wild Wreath Flowers from the Sky*

Inspired by photos a friend once showed me many years ago when they visited the wild wreath flowers in Western Australia, Dragonfly dances enjoying the colour of the night.

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