



Poetry in  
Meaningful Ways

*Muyan remembers  
hotly, biel and ballee smoke  
the crow, Waang,  
watches this young fire  
welcome to country*

*~ Ryan Prehn, commissioned poet  
from New Shoots Victoria,  
excerpt from 'Remnant'*

**INNOVATE  
RECONCILIATION  
ACTION PLAN  
JULY 2018, JULY 2020**



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# MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

*To heal to mend,  
Wakaymali,  
To sing to cause to dance,  
Wakanhawinanga,  
dances of listening,  
Listening to truth,  
Through our songs and stories,  
The land is our proof,  
Of our resilience,  
In our songs we cry  
Out to the sky,  
Biame,  
The land reflected in our eyes.*

~ Eric Avery, New Shoots commissioned poet

*Red Room Poetry acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, the Traditional Custodians of the Aboriginal lands on which we meet to work each day. We respect their Elders, past, present and of the future, appreciating their continued culture and care for this country.*

First Nations songs, stories and languages have echoed across this land for millennia. Recognising the importance of this continued culture, Red Room Poetry aims to celebrate and nurture opportunities for First Nations voices, expression and language-learning through community-led poetic arts projects. We have a long history of commissioning, publishing, and providing platforms for First Nations poets, artists, students, Elders and communities to celebrate, strengthen and share culture. These projects include Poet's Life Works (Lionel Fogarty); The Disappearing (Jeanine Leane); Poetry Object (Ellen Van Neerven, Evelyn Araluen Corr, Stiff Gins); Yala Gari (Lorna Munro, Eric Avery), New Shoots (Bruce Pascoe, Ryan Prehn, Carissa Lee Godwin, Kirli Saunders); Red Room Poetry Fellowship (Ali Cobby Eckermann); Unlocked (20+ Correctional Centres across NSW); and now Poetry in First Languages, led by Gunai poet and Red Room Poetry team member Kirli Saunders.

Continuing our commitment to reconciliation action, from 2018-2020 Poetry in First Languages will work with 15 First Nations poets, artists, Elders and language custodians to foster connection with culture, country, community and languages. Cultural capacity and competence of Red Room Poetry's staff and Board in supporting this, and other First Nations projects, is paramount.

We recognise the path to reconciliation can only be achieved with collective effort, and acknowledge the work and vision of others in this shared journey.

Dr Tamryn Bennett  
Artistic Director, Red Room Poetry

# OUR VISION FOR RECONCILIATION

Red Room Poetry acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and carers of the lands on which we meet to work each day, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

Ngununggula is a Gundungurra word shared with Red Room for the Poetry in First Languages Project by Gundungurra Elder, Aunty Velma Mulcahy and custodian, Aunty Trish Levett meaning 'walking together and working together'. Our vision for reconciliation is to Ngununggula, to walk and work together, to create in a reconciled, united and equal Australia.

Red Room Poetry is committed to cultivating a reconciled Australia by leading poetic arts projects that respectfully celebrate and share First Nations perspectives, voices and creative expression. Our initiatives actively engage with a range First Nations communities, organisations and individuals to develop, lead and enliven our projects and vision in culturally appropriate ways. Embedded in these projects will be the development of cultural competency within the staff at Red Room Poetry. We commit to honouring our role in creating opportunities to engage with First Nations poets, artists, language and Lore custodians, Elders and education communities to strengthen Australia's diverse and vibrant First Nations poetic arts and cultural sector.

We commit to drawing on our capacity to contribute to finding solutions that address the array of challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creatives and community members.



Dapto High School Students create collaborative poems with Red Room Poetry Fellow, Ali Cobby Eckermann.

# OUR BUSINESS



Boomerang painting and poetry at Balund-a, 2017

Red Room Poetry creates poetic projects and learning programs in collaboration with a spectrum of poets, schools, communities and partners for positive social impact. Our mission is to make poetry accessible to all, especially those who face the greatest barriers to creative opportunities.

Our staff are a team of 6, including 2 full-time employees. Our Board of Directors has 8 members. In 2017, Red Room Poetry engaged up to 10 volunteers and provided employment opportunities for 66 poets and 26 supporting artists nationally.

Of our team of 6, one full-time staff member (our Manager of Poetic Learning and Cultural Liaison) is a proud Gunai Woman with ties to the Yuin, Biripi, Gundungurra and Gadigal people. Of the 66 poets engaged, 11 identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (including our inaugural Red Room Poetry Fellow, Yankunytjatjara poet Ali Cobby Eckernann). Of the 26 support artists employed in 2017, 6 identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Our organisation has national reach. We also work internationally to deliver poetic projects such as Poetry Object and New Shoots in New Zealand. We have one central office, located at Lvl 11, 31 Market Street, Sydney 2000.

## **PRIORITY BREAKDOWNS: NSW, 2017**

### **Key Programs**

8 key programs: New Shoots NSW, New Shoots Victoria, Poetic Learning, Poetry Object, Unlocked, Yala Gari, Poetic Moments, Red Room Poetry Fellowship (granted to Ali Cobby Eckermann).

### **Activities / Events**

119 x activities in total / events (all programs)

77 x priority areas (including First Nations)

35 x Poetic Learning workshops lead by Kirli Saunders + Premier's Reading Challenge

### **Audiences**

22,362 total audience (all programs)

13,093 audience at First Nations focused events

12,039 of these were students

### **Poets**

12 x First Nation poets (employed)

### **Artists and Elders**

7 x First Nations artists & musicians (employed)

10 x First Nations Elders (employed)

### **Producers**

5 x First Nations managers/producers

### **Students**

22 x students @ Balund-a Diversionary Centre

35 x students during a 10-week program for Yala Gari

30 x students Poetry in First languages pilot

74 x students Pathways to Dreaming (Western Sydney University)

### **Partners**

6 x First Nations partners

# OUR RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

Red Room Poetry is ideally situated to lead reconciliation within the poetic arts sector in Australia, as the leading commissioning and publishing organisation for contemporary Australian poets' works. We have the capacity and platform to contribute to finding solutions to address the array of challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creatives and community members and commit to doing so through our poetic arts projects including Poetic Moments, Poetic Learning, Unlocked, New Shoots and Poetry In First Languages. Our Reconciliation Action Plan will record the actions already underway to contribute to reconciliation at Red Room Poetry.

Our Chair of the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group (RAPWG) is Kirli Saunders, proud Gunai woman and First Nations Cultural Liaison.

## **POETIC MOMENTS**

Poetic Moments elevates the visibility and accessibility of contemporary Australian poetry by publishing in unexpected places from trains to planes, street banners, murals and sculptural installations. Spanning multiple languages, the project creates opportunities to engage, respond and reflect via poetic provocations and partnerships that connect people and place through poetry. Poetic Moments aims to inspire audiences of all ages to find their own voices through poetry. In 2017, Red Room Poetry commissioned 3 First Nations artists for Poetic Moments, including 2 First Nations poets for Reconciliation Week and publishing poems in Wiradjuri on street banners during NAIDOC Week.

## **POETIC LEARNING**

Poetic Learning collaborates with students, teachers and communities to deepen their encounters with poetry across Australia. Our learning programs connect poets with students to nurture poetic ways of seeing, writing and responding. Red Room is committed to publishing these outcomes and providing a platform for young poets to share their work with wider audiences. In 2017, Red Room Poetry engaged 7 First Nations poets in the delivery of Poetic Learning programs such as Poetry Object, Yala Gari, Unlocked and NAIDOC week workshops.

## **UNLOCKED**

Unlocked is an innovative creative literacy program developed and run by Red Room Poetry in collaboration with poets and educational staff from NSW Correctional Centres. The program unlocks the potential of inmates through the reflective and healing power of poetry, encouraging self-expression that helps people write and share their stories to reconnect with their families and communities. Since 2010, Unlocked has delivered 20 programs, working intensively with over 250 inmates. These writing workshops cover every stage of the writing process, from the initial exercises and experimentations, through the editing and rewriting process, to recording, performing and publishing student work in meaningful ways.

In 2018, Youth Unlocked will allow Red Room to reach students in juvenile justice centres and behavioural intervention centres to support meaningful literacy development, poetic expression and reflection.

## **POETRY IN FIRST LANGUAGES**

Developed by Gunai Poet, Kirli Saunders, Poetry in First Languages (PIFL), will celebrate, share and preserve knowledge of First Nations languages and culture through poetry, music and art. Delivered by Red Room Poetry, PIFL seeks to support students to create poetry in First Languages by connecting them to First Nations Poets, Elders and Language Custodians on country through RR workshops. The underpinning focus is to strengthen the connection of First Nations students to country, language and community in order to empower them to feel pride in their cultural identities resulting in enhanced wellbeing overall.

Beginning in January 2018, for three years, Red Room Poetry will commission 15 First Nations poets from a range of communities across Australia to create and publish poems in First Nations languages. PIFL is a three-year language project with the aim to pilot the approach in NSW in 2018, then review and enhance for a refined continuation in Victoria and Queensland in 2019 with a national focus and program of engagement with Australia-wide communities in 2020.

Commissioned Poets will lead up to 30 poetry workshops between 2018-2020 to publish 500 poems in First Nations languages. These workshops will be supported by Elders and language custodians on Country.

Poems in First Nations languages from the workshops will be performed and published in local communities. In 2020, the poems will be published in a Red Room Poetry - Poetry in First Languages anthology.

The impact of PIFL on the enhancement of overall wellbeing and educational outcomes through connection to culture and language via poetry and the arts is being researched by Bailey and Yang Group and UTS Masters research student, Eleanor Carless.

## **NEW SHOOTS**

Created by Red Room Poetry, New Shoots, is a poetic partnership with the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, Sydney Olympic Park and Bundanon Trust. The project celebrates and cultivates poems inspired by plants and place. In 2017, Ryan Prehn (Palawa), Bruce Pasco (Yuin), Carissa Lee Godwin (Wemba Wemba) & Kirli Saunders (Gunai) were among the poets commissioned for New Shoots.

## **OUR RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN WORKING GROUP**

Our entire body of staff are responsible for enacting our RAP across our projects. This team is composed of the following roles:

- Artistic Director
- Director External Relations
- Director of Operations
- Manager Poetic Learning
- Producer Poetry Object
- Content Manager
- Volunteers (Various)
- Commissioned Poets (Various)
- Commissioned artists (Various)

Partnered organisations that support Red Room Poetry in enacting the Reconciliation Action Plan include:

- Australia Council for the Arts
- Create NSW
- Copyright Agency Cultural Fund
- UNESCO
- NASCA
- AIME
- Illawarra Multicultural Services
- Justice NSW

- NSW Department of Education
- Royal Botanical Gardens Sydney
- Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne
- State Library NSW
- Wingecarribee Shire Council
- Wollongong City Council
- City of Sydney
- First Languages Australia
- Art Gallery of NSW
- Wollongong Art Gallery

Of our team of 6, one of our full-time staff (our Manager of Poetic Learning and Cultural Liaison) is a proud Gunai Woman with ties to the Yuin, Biripi, Gundungurra and Gadigal people. Of the 66 poets engaged by Red Room Poetry, 11 identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Of the 26 support artists employed in 2017, 6 identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. These individuals, as well as organisations will support Red Room Poetry in enacting our reconciliation action plan.

Our organisation does not have an external First Nations advisory group. We draw upon national research to ensure our projects benefit First Nations poets, artists and communities. We also evaluate our projects with external evaluators and have engaged a Masters Research student from UTS to research the impact of our Poetry in First Languages project in 2018-19.

The existing body of research that indicates expression of culture through arts leads to an enhancement of subjective wellbeing and therefore improved socio-economic indicators (employment, income and education outcomes) (Australia Council for the Arts, 2017; The Council of Australian Governments 2008; Biddle & Crawford, 2014-15). In this way our projects focus on cultural expression.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Indigenous Reform



Unlocked 2017 performances, Balund-a Diversionsary Centre



A First Nations poet performs for New Shoots

Agreement (2008) outlines that in addressing Indigenous Disadvantage, we must celebrate and build on the strength of Indigenous Cultures and Identities. RR aims to celebrate First Nations students' connection to culture, language and country through our projects.

Similarly, the literature outlines a strong relationship between First Nations language maintenance and arts engagement, and many First Nations people across Australia are connecting to their culture by learning First Nations languages (Australia Council for the Arts). As of 2008, 7% of First Nations people were learning a First Nations language. Through Red Room Poetry's Poetry in First Languages and Unlocked/ Youth Unlocked projects, we aim to support language learning, meaningful connection to culture and creative expression.

Furthermore, Haviland et al. 2009 confirm the role of poetry as a medium to enable connection to culture and therefore enhanced self-efficacy for intercultural communities.



A First Nations student reads his poetry at Alexandria Park School

# RELATIONSHIPS

<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>			
Positive and respectful relationships with First Nations individuals and organisations are integral in delivering meaningful Red Room Poetry projects and programs that celebrate and share First Nations culture and language.			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
1. Our RAP Working Group (RWG) actively monitors RAP development and implementation of actions, tracking progress and reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RAPWG oversees the development, endorsement and launch of the RAP.</li> <li>Ensure First Nations peoples are represented on the RWG.</li> <li>Meet at least twice per year to monitor and report on RAP implementation.</li> <li>Establish Terms of Reference for the RWG.</li> </ul>	<p>July, 2018</p> <p>July, 2018</p> <p>July/ Dec, 2018</p> <p>July, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manager of Poetic Learning</li> <li>Artistic Director</li> </ul>

<p>2. Celebrate and participate in National Reconciliation Week (NRW) by providing opportunities to build and maintain relationships between First Nations peoples and other Australians.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organise/ participate in at least one internal event for NRW each year</li> <li>• Register all NRW events via Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.</li> <li>• Support an external NRW event.</li> <li>• Encourage staff to participate in external events to recognise and celebrate NRW.</li> <li>• Ensure our RAP Working Group participates in an external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.</li> <li>• Download Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and circulate to staff.</li> </ul>	<p>27 May- 3 June</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff all</li> </ul>
<p>3. Develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations to support positive outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement an engagement plan to work with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.</li> <li>• Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement.</li> </ul>	<p>June, 2018  July, 2018 - June, 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director of External Relations</li> <li>• Manager of Poetic Learning</li> </ul>
<p>4. Raise internal and external awareness of our RAP to promote reconciliation across our business and sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a strategy to communicate our RAP to all internal and external stakeholders.</li> <li>• Promote reconciliation through ongoing active engagement with all stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<p>Feb, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff all</li> </ul>



<p>7. Engage employees in understanding the significance of First Nations cultural protocols, such as Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, to ensure there is a shared meaning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop, implement and communicate a protocol document for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.</li> <li>• Develop a list of key contacts for organising a Welcome to Country, delivering Red Room Poetry workshops and maintaining respectful partnerships.</li> <li>• Invite a Traditional Owner to provide a Welcome to Country at significant events, including PIFL workshops.</li> <li>• Include an Acknowledgement of Country at the commencement of all important internal and external meetings.</li> <li>• Encourage staff to include an Acknowledgement of Country at the commencement of all meetings.</li> <li>• Employ First Nations Elders, Custodians, artists and community for Poetry Object, Poetry in First Languages, and Unlocked.</li> </ul>	<p>Oct, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff all</li> </ul>
<p>8. Provide opportunities for First Nations staff to engage with their culture and communities by celebrating NAIDOC Week</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review company policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to participate with their cultures and communities during NAIDOC Week.</li> </ul>	<p>First week in July</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic Director</li> <li>• First Nations staff</li> </ul>
<p>9. Engage community through mindful planning against KPIs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed KPIs ensuring the commissioning of First Nations poets and artists in RR projects</li> <li>• Secure employment opportunities for First Nations poets and artists</li> <li>• Consult with First Nations Elders, community members and custodians to deliver poetry projects</li> </ul>	<p>July, 2018</p> <p>July, 2018/ Dec, 2018</p> <p>July, 2018 - June, 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff all</li> </ul>

# OPPORTUNITIES

<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>			
Providing employment opportunities for First Nations peoples, poets, artists, Elders and custodians and supporting First Nations educational communities enhances our poetic arts projects and strengthens the cultural identity of contemporary Australian poetry.			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
10. Investigate opportunities to improve and increase First Nations employment outcomes within our workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect information on our current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to inform future employment opportunities.</li> <li>Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Retention strategy.</li> <li>Engage with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to consult on employment strategies, including professional development.</li> <li>Advertise all vacancies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.</li> <li>Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to ensure there are no barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and future applicants participating in our workplace.</li> </ul>	<p>Oct, 2018</p> <p>July, 2018</p> <p>July, 2018 - June, 2019</p> <p>July 2018 - June, 2019</p> <p>July 2018 - June, 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Artistic Director</li> <li>Director of External Relations</li> </ul>

<p>11. Investigate opportunities to incorporate First Nations supplier diversity within our organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and update procurement policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers for procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.</li> <li>• Develop and communicate to staff a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that can be used to procure goods and services.</li> <li>• Develop at least one commercial relationship with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned business.</li> <li>• Investigate Supply Nation membership.</li> </ul>	<p>July, 2018 - June, 2019</p> <p>July, 2018</p> <p>July, 2018 - June, 2019</p> <p>August, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic Director</li> <li>• Director of External Relations</li> </ul>
<p>12. Investigate First Nations Career Development and Employment Opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RAP Manager / Cultural liaison</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership within organisation</li> </ul>	<p>July, 2018 - June, 2019</p> <p>August, 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff all</li> </ul>

# GOVERNANCE, TRACKING PROGRESS AND REPORTING

<b>GOVERNANCE, TRACKING PROGRESS AND REPORTING</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
13. Report RAP achievements, challenges and learnings to Reconciliation Australia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia annually.</li> <li>• Investigate participating in the RAP Barometer.</li> </ul>	July 2018/ July 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager of Poetic Learning</li> </ul>
14. Report RAP achievements, challenges and learnings internally and externally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publically report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic Director</li> </ul>
15. Review, refresh and update RAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.</li> <li>• Send draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for review and feedback.</li> <li>• Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal endorsement.</li> </ul>	Jan 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager of Poetic Learning</li> <li>• Artistic Director</li> <li>• Director of External Relations</li> </ul>
16. Include other actions related to tracking progress and reporting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate RAP success</li> <li>• Amend RAP for 2021</li> <li>• Write Draft</li> <li>• Submit Draft RAP for 2021 endorsement</li> </ul>	Dec 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager of Poetic Learning</li> <li>• Artistic Director</li> <li>• Director of External Relations</li> </ul>



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For further information:  
Kirli Saunders: Manager Poetic Learning, First Nations Cultural Liaison  
Dr Tamryn Bennett: Director

Red Room Poetry  
PO Box 1105 Surry Hills  
NSW 2010 Australia

(02) 9319 5090  
[contact@redroomcompany.org](mailto:contact@redroomcompany.org)  
[redroomcompany.org](http://redroomcompany.org)