

Annie North Leadership Reflections

National NAIDOC Week – 50 Years of Deadly

This second edition of our Annie North Leadership Reflection marks and celebrates *50 Years of Deadly*, the theme for this year's [National NAIDOC Week 2026](#).

National NAIDOC Week centres First Nations people and celebrates the achievements, survival, strengths, pride and connection to Country and Community. As a proud ally, Annie North honours and celebrates the enduring legacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose culture stands as the oldest continuous living culture on earth.

The 2026 National NAIDOC Week theme, *50 Years of Deadly* invites us to celebrate five decades of systemic resistance, cultural pride, and structural reform driven by First Nations activists and communities. This historic milestone marks 50 years since the establishment of the National NAIDOC Committee, framing a half-century of continuous advocacy to dismantle the legal and political injustices of colonisation.

By celebrating this timeline, the theme centres the enduring fight for self-determination, constitutional recognition, and undisputed sovereignty over traditional lands.

The landmark *Mabo v Queensland [No 2]* (1992) ruling and the subsequent *Native Title Act 1993* stand as two of the most significant legal and cultural achievements in modern Australian history. By overturning the false premise of *terra nullius*, the High Court fundamentally altered the nation's legal landscape and formally acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have a continuous, spiritual, and legal connection to their traditional lands

Preceding this, and in a powerful symbol of land rights and cultural reclamation, the Australian Government in 1985, officially returned Uluru to its Traditional Owners, the Anangu People. And before this, in 1972 a protest camp called the Tent Embassy was established on the lawns of Old Parliament House by Aboriginal activists and has become the longest continuous protest for land rights and sovereignty in the world.

The historic, generations-long advocacy of First Nations people reached a significant turning point with the passage of the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025*. When the Act received Royal Assent on 13 November 2025, Victoria became the first jurisdiction in Australian history to enact a legislated treaty with Aboriginal peoples. [Gellung Warl](#) is the new First Peoples' representative body established through Treaty and is made up of democratically elected Traditional Owners.

As a foundational framework for Victoria's Treaty process, the [Yoorrook Justice Commission](#) stands as Australia's first Aboriginal-led inquiry into systemic injustices. By permanently archiving more than 2,000 deeply personal accounts from Elders and survivors, the Commission has created an indisputable public record. However, translating these recorded truths into systemic action remains an ongoing challenge: while the final report was delivered 1 July 2025, the Victorian government has accepted 30 of the Commission's recommendations, 13 remain under active consideration, and 16 have been rejected or noted for ongoing consideration.

Turning closer to home, with Annie North refuge situated on beautiful Dja Dja Wurrung Country, we shared in celebration as the Dja Dja Wurrung (Djaara) peoples became the first Traditional Owner groups to negotiate local, country specific treaties.

As Annie North reflects on *50 Years of Deadly*, we acknowledge the lessons learned since our beginnings in 1989. Through our work with Aboriginal women, children and communities, we have come to understand that Aboriginal identity, pride, and connection to Country, Community and Culture are powerful strengths that promote safety, healing and wellbeing. Guided by this understanding, Annie North has built long-standing partnerships with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, including the [Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative](#) and [Djirra](#), to help ensure Aboriginal women and children can access culturally safe and responsive support.

As part of Annie North's ongoing cultural humility journey, the organisation recently reflected on the use of Dja Dja Wurrung language associated with the Pallert Tooree Larr program, established in 2004. While the name reflected the language advice, understanding and relationships available at that time, guidance from Dja Dja Wurrung Elder and language knowledge holder Aunty Sandy Barber has highlighted the importance of revisiting and validating language through contemporary Traditional Owner processes.

This engagement reinforced that language is deeply connected to identity, culture, Country and self-determination, and that language revitalisation is an ongoing journey led by Traditional Owners. Through respectfully seeking advice from Djaara language and cultural knowledge holders, Annie North has strengthened its understanding of the importance of pausing, listening, checking and learning. It is through these relationships and conversations that organisations build trust, deepen cultural understanding and ensure First Nations voices help guide decisions that affect community.

Subject to ongoing guidance and with the permission of Djaara, Annie North welcomes the opportunity to update the program name to reflect contemporary Dja Dja Wurrung language advice. In the interim, the program may be referenced as the Strong First Nations Women's Camp/Home (formerly known as Pallert Tooree Larr), with a renewed name, language and meaning to be launched in partnership with Djaara at a future date. Annie North acknowledges and thanks Djaara for their generosity in sharing knowledge and supporting this learning journey.

National NAIDOC Week is first and foremost about celebrating First Nations people, culture, survival, strength and achievement. As Annie North reflects on *50 Years of Deadly*, we recognise that our responsibility is not to lead First Nations voices but to listen to them, learn from them and ensure they are centred in the decisions that shape our work.

We know the over-representation of Aboriginal women and children in family violence systems is not accidental. It reflects the ongoing impacts of colonisation, systemic racism and structures that continue to fail our communities. Last year alone, Annie North reported a 64 per cent increase in First Nations women accessing services. These numbers represent real women, real children and real communities.

Our role is to stand alongside community, strengthen partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, support First Nations leadership and use our governance, workforce and influence to advocate for meaningful and lasting systemic change. Cultural humility is a continuous journey of learning, listening, reflection and accountability, and we remain committed to walking that path together.

Narlinga Morgan

Vice-Chairperson, Annie North
Committee of Management
proud Dja Dja Wurrung, Yorta Yorta
and Wamba Wamba woman

Guided by the robust strategic oversight of its [Committee of Management](#), [Annie North](#) continues to advance its governance journey by embedding the newly established First Nations Governance Sub-Committee, ensuring that First Nations leadership, voice, and self-determination deeply inform our ongoing mission to support women and children [escaping family violence](#).

Sadly, as we reflect on our work with Aboriginal women and children in refuge, Victorian and National [data](#) continues to highlight the overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in family violence incidents and rates of, hospitalisation, homicide and child removal. Increasingly, Aboriginal women are misidentified as the primary aggressor in family violence incidents and are too often disbelieved and harmed by systems that claim neutrality while operating through racialised, gendered and classist assumptions.

Aboriginal activists and scholars have criticised the term ‘misidentification’ for misrepresenting how the justice system fails First Nations’ women by treating structural bias as individual error.

[Djirra](#) explicitly state that:

‘misidentification is not a mistake, it’s a systemic failure rooted in racism and racial profiling, and it is devastating for Aboriginal women’.

Writing for the National Network of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, Tabitha Lean argues:

Aboriginal women in particular are routinely constructed as aggressive, uncooperative, intoxicated, neglectful or inherently criminal, while the violence committed against them is minimised, ignored or reframed. Calling this ‘misidentification’ sanitises the harm. It suggests an administrative error; a mix-up, a misunderstanding, an accidental misreading of events. But many women know exactly what it feels like to be disbelieved, targeted, threatened with arrest, removed from their children or criminalised for surviving violence. These are not isolated mistakes. They are structural outcomes produced by systems built on policing, punishment, and colonial control.

For services like Annie North, grounded in social justice and anti-oppressive practices, National NAIDOC Week importantly highlights the critical work still needed to examine whiteness, dismantle colonialism in community services and move towards cultural humility. Truth-telling requires us to name how systems are weaponised against First Nations victim-survivors, driving deep distrust, wrongful criminalisation, and forced child removals.

The findings of the Yoorrook Justice Commission remind us that truth-telling must lead to structural accountability. For Annie North, this means continuing to listen deeply, act with humility, and centre First Nations voices in the decisions that shape our work. Guided by First Nations members of our Committee of Management, our partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and our commitment to shared leadership, Annie North will continue to strengthen culturally safe practice and embed First Nations perspectives across both strategic and everyday action.

As we mark *50 Years of Deadly*, we celebrate the enduring strength, wisdom and leadership of Aboriginal peoples and communities. National NAIDOC Week acknowledges the vital role of Culture, connection to Country and self-determination in creating strong families and thriving communities. It also calls on us to continue supporting Aboriginal-led solutions, championing the rights, safety and voices of Aboriginal women and children, and walking alongside communities in genuine partnership. This commitment remains at the heart of Annie North's work and future.

“At the heart of this reflection is the reminder that Aboriginal women, children and communities are not defined by crisis, violence or system failure. We carry culture, kinship, survival, leadership, knowledge and self-determination. Our responsibility is to listen deeply, act with humility and accountability, and walk alongside Aboriginal women and Aboriginal-led organisations already leading this work”.

Eboni Kerr

Committee of Management member, Annie North Inc and proud Barkindji woman.

This article was written by Dr Kylie Cocking, Quality and Compliance Lead at Annie North, May 2026 and represents the first article in a series of quarterly leadership reflections published on [Annie North's website](#).

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