

The Arrilla Circle



A quarterly communicate exclusive to Arrilla Digital, where authors of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent share their life experiences in order for us to walk in the shoes of another.

July 2026

A Goodstart: Melody Ingra on Reconciliation, Education and Cultural Connection



Melody Ingra, a proud Gooreng Gooreng / Wakka Wakka woman from Yallarm (Gladstone QLD) shares insights on how cultural competency, reconciliation and meaningful early learning experiences can influence not only today's children, but future generations of Australians.

Galen Nyeeri all,

I'm Melody Ingra, and I'm a proud Gooreng Gooreng / Wakka Wakka woman from Yallarm (Gladstone QLD).

As a mother, Aunty and Nanna, I want my grannies to grow up in a society that embraces, values and connects with culture, Country and First Nations people on the land which we all share.

I dream of a future where our Dhubeels/Jarjums are not burdened by racism, prejudice or hate, but grow up surrounded by understanding, respect, connection and pride. A future where First Nations histories, cultures and knowledges are not an afterthought, but recognised as an essential part of who we are.

A powerful pathway to change hearts and minds

For me, education has always been a powerful pathway to change hearts and minds.

I became a teacher because I wanted to challenge stereotypes and myths that were so often told about my people. I wanted children to learn the truth of our stories, our strength, our resilience and our enduring connection to Country.

I have six children and seven grandchildren. My first babies were born when I was living and teaching in Woorabinda, attending the local daycare where the educators were our community-our Aunts, our Nans, our family.

Every morning I went to work knowing my babies were safe, loved and surrounded by culture. They were being raised by a village that knew them, valued them and nurtured their identity.

I had the same experience in Gladstone where my children's daycare was run by the most wonderful and beautiful family. Each morning felt like I was dropping my babies off to spend the day with their Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles. We felt safe, connected and supported.

As a teacher, I loved having that real connection with students; that real impact on their lives. Along with my work as the Principal Project Officer with the Remote Indigenous Professional Development program sparked my deep interest in the early years sector. Sharing with educators and connecting cultural practices to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) was truly inspiring.

Those experiences shaped my understanding of what early childhood education can be - that when children feel safe, connected and valued, they thrive.

That's why 'educating the educators' is so important.

Reconciliation across the organisation

I'm now the National Cultural Liaison at Goodstart Early Learning -Australia's largest early learning provider, founded by four non-profit organisations committed to social justice.

Goodstart has 650 early learning centres across Australia, with a vision to provide all children with the best possible start in life.

My role requires focus on the entire organisation to ensure reconciliation is woven through all that we do, and I work with centres to help them embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in their everyday practice.

I'm so proud to say that all 650 of our centres has an individual Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) through the Narragunnawali platform, and we have our Stretch RAP as an organisation.

Our RAPs are not just 'tick and flick' documents. They are integral and meaningful, because a published RAP is about all the things you learn along the way, both personally and professionally, as they are developed.

It's a journey I've enjoyed with so many Goodstarters.

The role of Arrilla in cultural learning

A foundational piece of our cultural competency work across the organisation has been providing access to Arrilla Digital online training, with more than 27,000 Goodstarters completing the modules since 2018.

With early years being such a complex and highly-regulated sector, there are many competing priorities for our centre teams, so having Arrilla to help us embed reconciliation across our network is central.

At first, providing the Arrilla modules was about providing a basic understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and ways across the organisation.

Arrilla met that need because it was so easily accessible.

We currently have a completion rate of 87%, which is phenomenal when you consider that although we do attach KPIs to it, we don't treat it as mandatory training. Around 95% of our workforce are on the floor in centres working with children, not sitting in front of a computer.

It's also phenomenal because our educators come from such a diversity of backgrounds, with more than 110 nationalities represented. For those educators who have not had the opportunity to dive into the true history of our country, Arrilla is a great place to start.

Importance of a cultural competency framework

The Early Years Learning Framework is the national curriculum for children from birth to five years. Its focus on *belonging, being and becoming* forms the start to all those working in early years knowing and understanding the history of, and why we even have, reconciliation.

Another important piece our sector's approach to cultural competence is the Child Safe Standard's [Universal Principle](#) –creating environments that make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children feel culturally safe, which means welcome, safe, valued, included and respected.

At Goodstart we aim to be impactful in the lives of children and influential across the early learning landscape, which includes scaling impact beyond Goodstart so that all children benefit from quality early learning.

For us, meeting the Universal Principle means our educators need to understand what cultural safety looks like for families – participating in the Arrilla training is baseline to having that knowledge, so that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children come to Goodstart each day they feel safe.

The ‘ripple effect’ of teaching little ones

Children are so curious. When you go into a centre and share culture, they are just so interested, and ask many questions. When I spend time in our centres, I see children having that sense of connection straight away, and that creates a ripple effect.

As a mother, Auntie and grandmother I want change for the future so we aren’t still fighting for the same things into the next generations.

At Goodstart we have 64,000 children attending our centres - so that’s 53,000 families we impact.

We have a real opportunity with our reconciliation activity to make a change for future generations, so that my grandkids don’t grow up going through the same things that my forefathers and I went through.

That’s what I love about my role at Goodstart. It’s the opportunity to have influence on the next generation, and if children acknowledge Country and know about the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country, they will develop understanding, empathy and connection.

And if we have a cohort of non-Indigenous children who grow up connected with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, that’s going to make a difference to my grandkids, and future generations of First Nations children in this country, because they’re going to walk alongside each other.

Every child deserves to grow up knowing who they are, where they belong and that their culture, their story and their identity matter. And every child deserves the opportunity to walk together in a future built on truth, respect, understanding and connection.

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