

Power of connection



Pat Dudgeon

I was very proud and honoured to welcome an incredible group of international Indigenous psychologists to Boorloo (Perth) last month for a Global Cultural Exchange. Our visitors joined us at the University of Western Australia (UWA) from as far away as Aotearoa (New Zealand), Ngambri and Ngannawal Country (Canberra), Fisher River Cree Nation (in Manitoba Canada), and Táp Pílām Coahuiltecan Nation (in Texas, USA). I've called beautiful Whadjuk Noongar boodjar my home for over 40 years, although I grew up on Larrakia Country (Darwin) and I'm originally a Bardi woman from the Kimberley, and it gave me great joy to see deadly Indigenous peoples from around the world come to Noongar Country.

Each one of our guests is a dear friend and incredible Indigenous researcher doing great work for their respective communities. Associate Professor Waikaremoana Waitoki is of Māori descent, affiliated with Ngāti Hako and Ngāti Māhanga iwi, working in the Te Pua Wānanga ki te Ao Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies, and a clinical psychologist. Associate Professor Jeffrey Ansloos is a citizen of Fisher River Cree Nation and the Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Studies in Health, Suicide Studies & Environmental Justice at the University of Toronto. Dr Mark Standing Eagle Baez is a descendant of the Mohawk and Pawnee people, President-elect of the Society of Indian Psychologists and Associate Professor of Clinical and Counselling Psych at Bemidji State University. Dr Hukarere Valentine is a senior Māori Clinical Psychologist and co-director of the Centre for Indigenous Psychologies at Massey University. Dr Stewart Sutherland is a Wiradjuri man, born and raised in Wellington, NSW, with over 20 years of experience in Indigenous health and a Senior Lecturer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health at the ANU School of Medicine. Each of us found recognition and solidarity with each other as Indigenous psychologists and researchers; we walked together, we listened, we shared our stories, and we made plans. Our yarns coalesced around a shared belief in the importance of decolonisation and cultural reclamation for health equity and restorative justice for

International collaboration for global cultural wellbeing



Group photo taken at Wungening Aboriginal Corporation on the 25th of October of Dr Christine Clinch (Wungening Corporation Board Secretary), Associate Professor Jeffrey Ansloos, Associate Professor Waikaremoana Waitoki, Dr Stewart Sutherland, Professor Pat Dudgeon, Dr Mark Standing Eagle Baez, Dr Randi George, Dr Hukarere Valentine, Suzanne Bain-Donohue, and Daniel Morrison (CEO of Wungening Corporation).

Indigenous peoples around the globe.

The group arrived in Boorloo on the 24th of October, coming in from Ngambri and Ngannawal Country where Stewart had first hosted us all as part of the Winhangadurinya Project (an Australian National University research venture exploring Indigenous mindfulness and intersection with ways of thinking among Indigenous peoples). First up, we visited Wungening Aboriginal Corporation; we felt that it was important that our international visitors see some of the great work being done by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and hear the voices of Elders, lived experience, and community leaders. At Wungening we heard introductions and presentations, we shared lunch and stories with each other. Commonalities emerged around the importance of holistic social and emotional wellbeing, embracing spiritual health and health of Country, and the importance of engaging diverse community members in every stage of research. Dr Waitoki and Dr Hukarere sung a healing song for the Elders who had shared that the community were grieving a loss.

Our visitors then delivered a public lecture at the WA Museum Boola Bardip on the 25th; we called it 'Climate Change and Global Indigenous Psychology'. Dr Valentine, Dr Baez, A/Prof. Waitoki, and A/Prof. Ansloos each delivered presentations and answered questions from the audience, while Stewart and I hosted. Our speakers discussed the impact of climate change on mental health for First Nations peoples whose connections to



Aunty Tjalaminu Mia conducting a Welcome to Country at the University of Western Australia on Whadjuk Noongar boodjar on the 28th of October – surrounded by guests and UWA staff members.

Country are central to the health of their mind, body, and spirit and the social and emotional wellbeing of families and communities. The stories were personal and moving. Dr Baez shared a beautiful song at the beginning and end.

With their last day on Noongar boodjar, we started the day with a visit to the Western Australia Aboriginal Health Council where we were able to share a lunch with AHCWA staff and some of the CEO network from across our state. Our group of visitors then came to Bilya Marlee – the home of the School of Indigenous Studies at UWA. I was grateful to Noongar Elders Aunty Roma Winmar and Aunty Tjalaminu Mia for conducting a beautiful smoking ceremony as a Welcome to Country. Thank you also to Micheal Spratt, a Whadjuk Noongar Yamatji man, who

played didgeridoo and assisted Aunty TJ and Aunty Roma. It was fabulous to see youth participating in culture and supporting their Elders. Our own Aunty TJ shares here her feelings on the exchange, from the perspective of a Noongar Elder: "it was a pleasure to meet our international and national visitors because of their shared interest and commitment to nurturing a higher level of awareness globally through sharing cultural knowledge to heal our collective peoples and the planet – and I loved doing the TikToks with them as their messages were so positive".

A/Prof. Jeffrey Ansloos, Dr Mark Standing Eagle Baez, Dr Allison Baez, Prof Pat Dudgeon and A/Prof Sutherland then presented at the prestigious Robin Winkler Lecture for 2024, from the School of Psychological

Science and Centre for Social Impact, both here at UWA. Talks centred around the statement 'Mental Health is Political: Global Indigenous Struggles for Racial Justice and Collective Healing'. Dr Baez talked about the corrosive effects of colonialism on the mental health of Indigenous peoples and the need for self-determination. He asked the question: without a critical mass of Indigenous psychologists, how do we undo colonialism? Jeffrey shared on his research in Canada: he's been looking at how being Indigenous and having a mental health emergency makes you more likely to experience harm from police and less likely to receive support.

It was inspiring to have Elders and community members attend both the museum and Robin Winkler lectures after meeting the visitors on Friday. The dialogues and talks highlighted shared challenges: climate justice, environmental activism, Indigenous methodologies, and criminalisation and policing. However, they also highlighted solutions informed by Indigenous knowledges, system change, and Indigenous sovereignty. We were able to connect with and learn from the rich histories and successful strategies of other nations, sparking conversations that will inform local advocacy and inspire continued collaborations.

Global collaboration is not just beneficial but essential. This Exchange was a powerful reminder of what can be achieved when Indigenous communities unite across borders. The sharing of histories, wisdom, and challenges by Indigenous peoples creates opportunities for alliances in the pursuit of restorative justice and self-determination. Global collaborations are happening across the Indigenous sector in powerful ways. By the 29th of October each of our international collaborators and friends had left Noongar Boodjar but not without plans to collaborate again; we have papers and research grants in our sights, continued sharing to do on Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing and most of all, we have a shared commitment to continue to stand in solidarity as Indigenous leaders in mental health.

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This article is part of a series of Koori Mail columns about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention, to be contributed by authors from the CBPATISIP, which was established in 2017 to develop and share evidence about effective suicide prevention approaches for Indigenous people and communities.