



THE MAGAZINE OF THE UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER CHRISTIAN CONGRESS

FROM THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR



**G**reetings! It continues to be an eventful year for Congress as we continue to create life transforming social and economic pathways for Aboriginal and Islander people. The outcomes of these endeavors are manifested in the many success stories some of which are featured within. Whether this is in schooling, adult education, elderly care, rehabilitation, Indigenous tourism enterprise support or any other Congress initiative, the results are the product of many dedicated people working together toward a common goal reflected in our mission: The UAICC is made up of ordinary people who do extraordinary things with God promoting the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians through holistic evangelism, justice, transformation and empowerment.

Under girding our mission is our focus on reaffirming and strengthening Indigenous spirituality as the very driver of what motivates people to recognize that positive change is needed and to then seek pathways to accomplish this change. This was a powerful theme in the recent National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Alliance (NATSICA) Summit that was recently convened in Alice Springs. The forum detailed alternatives to the Government's so called 'emergency intervention' and drew upon the wisdom of (NATSICA) members and those of local community members. The important distinction between (NATSICA's) position and that of the Government was based on (NATSICA) addressing the root causes and not just the symptoms of community dysfunction. The final policy document is available on the Parliament of Australia website. [http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon\\_ctte/nt\\_emergency/submissions/sub22.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/nt_emergency/submissions/sub22.pdf)

Just some stories within, we congratulate the commissioning of Rev Neville Naden and Pastor Rodney Minniecon and pray that they will continue to influence positive change to the lives of those they engage with. Congress Victoria continue to permeate Indigenous cultural understanding into the broader community with another successful NARANA Fest and we look forward to the emergence and exciting community development work of the Beanganing Kwuurt Institute in Western Australia.

As we continue our journey we invite you to share in our achievements and challenges by engaging with Congress. For further information relating to any of our programs or to subscribe to future editions of 'Message Stick', please contact the national communications unit: [rpuacc@bigpond.com](mailto:rpuacc@bigpond.com)


Rev Shayne Blackman  
National Administrator  
Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress

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## NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE (NATSICA)

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Alliance (NATSICA), of which Congress is a member, has convened in Alice Springs to detail and advocate for an effective alternative strategy to the Australian Government's emergency Indigenous intervention plan. The two day historic summit held on the 18-19th July 2007 was attended by (NATSICA) members who worked together to devise an innovative and alternative program grounded in traditional Aboriginal and Islanders spirituality and knowledge.



Members of (NATSICA) drew upon their expertise to devise alternatives to the Australian Government's Emergency Intervention strategy.

Since the Summit, the Australian Government has effectively ignored calls for a more appropriate response and has pushed for controversial legislation authorizing its intervention in Northern Territory's Indigenous communities.



Representatives from various affected communities attended the Summit to share their views and wisdom.

(NATSICA) Chief Executive Officer the Rev Shayne Blackman said that while consultative Government measures to curb child abuse was welcome, the rushed approach and resulting legislation was patchy and ignored the very

essence of a complex problem that needed to be under girded by an Indigenous spiritual element.

"Indigenous spirituality has proven to be a very powerful force for empowering Aboriginal people to take responsibility in exercising their right to address the dysfunctional nature of some communities.

"But what we are faced with is a Government ignoring the engagement of Indigenous people in the community development process which is further marred by their superficial military laced approach to the complex issue of child abuse.

"This will only serve to demonize, stereotype and further break the spirits of the Indigenous community. The Government needs to engage Indigenous leaders who have a demonstrated capability in this area of concern especially in the implementation of long sighted programs that affirm people, lifts their spirits and inspires them to change the future direction of their communities.



(NATSICA) CEO the Rev Shayne Blackman articulates the group's position to ABC Television News.

"Only then will people take ownership and responsibility for their actions and this is what the (NATSICA) Summit policy recommendations have reflected. This initially translates into providing adequate long term support for overcoming deep rooted community problems such as alcohol supply, overcrowding and inadequate housing, the high cost of nutritious foods and access to quality education as just some pressing examples.

"Child abuse can be stopped with the right measures and framework in place and we are hopeful that the Government revises its hasty legislation to embrace the (NATSICA) Summit's recommendations" said Rev Blackman.

# THE (NATSICA) SUMMIT ALICE SPRINGS 18 - 19TH JULY 2007

The (NATSICA) Summit was held at the Fred Mackay Centre at St Philips College in Alice Springs. The centre proved to be an excellent venue and was earmarked by (NATSICA) for possible future forums. An integral part of the Summit was the key involvement of Indigenous community members from the Northern Territory.

(NATSICA) Chairman Rev Max Wright said that while the Government's Intervention has brought the issue of child abuse to national attention the approach to

tackle the issue needed urgent revision.

Rev Wright stated that a far more effective approach would be one that embraces the call from the Indigenous community leaders for a long term sustainable measures that addresses the root causes of why abuse occurs in the first place. He also stressed the importance of implementing social and economic programs that empower Indigenous people to take hold of their *rights and responsibilities* to make positive changes.

## FACT FILE

THE CENTRAL ARRERENTE PEOPLE ARE THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF ALICE SPRINGS.

THE TOWN IS THE MAJOR SERVICE CENTRE FOR SOME 260 COMMUNITIES IN THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN REGION.

APPROXIMATELY 30% OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY'S CENTRAL AUSTRALIA REGIONAL POPULATION (11,000-12,000) LIVE IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES THAT SEVERELY LACK ADEQUATE ACCESS TO A RANGE OF SERVICES. THERE ARE 19 LEGALLY ESTABLISHED TOWN CAMPS IN ALICE SPRINGS AND TWO CAMPS WITHOUT LEASES. TOWN CAMPS ARE SMALL COMMUNITIES MADE UP OF FAMILY MEMBERS OR MEMBERS OF THE SAME LANGUAGE GROUPS. THESE COMMUNITY RESIDENTS SHARE LINGUISTIC OR GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS, AND THE CAMPS TEND TO BE IN LOCATIONS WHICH CORRESPOND TO THE DIRECTION CLOSEST TO THE RESIDENTS 'TRADITIONAL COUNTRY.



ALICE SPRINGS



FRED MACKAY CENTRE, ST. PHILIPS COLLEGE



NATSICA DELEGATES



(NATSICA) CHAIRPERSON REV MAX WRIGHT TALKS TO THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL MEDIA ASSOCIATION (CAAMA)

## FACT FILE

ABORIGINAL WOMEN ACROSS MANY HEALTH INDICATORS ARE FARING EVEN WORSE THAN THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION AS A WHOLE.

THEY ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY THAN ABORIGINAL MEN TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE LONG-TERM CONDITION AND ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE SEVERAL CHRONIC DISEASES AT ONCE.

THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE HIGH OR VERY HIGH PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS. MORE LIKELY TO HAVE ASTHMA, EYE PROBLEMS, DIABETES AND HEART DISEASE. MORE LIKELY TO RATE THEIR OWN HEALTH AS MERELY FAIR OR EVEN POOR.

- ABS AUGUST 2007



## REV NEVILLE NADEN COMMISSIONING

Broken Hill Uniting Church has celebrated the commissioning of Rev Neville Naden as he prepares to work with the UAICC in the far west of NSW. On the 6th May 2007, people traveled from Sydney, Adelaide and some of the surrounding towns around Broken Hill to join in the celebrations. It was a great time of worship and praise led by Pastor Mark Kickett. The commissioning was performed by Rev Ken Sumner, Chairperson UAICC South Australia and Dianne Torrens, Chairperson UAICC New South Wales.



Rev Neville Naden (right) commissioned by Rev Ken Sumner and Dianne Torrens.

Neville travels extensively throughout the Far West to share the love of Christ and encourages people in their faith. He sees the success of any sustainable ministry being undergirded by a large component of training. He is now in the process of coordinating training seminars with the help of various supporting Denominations.



Rev Neville Naden is joined by his family on his commissioning.

We ask that you pray for the work as Neville and his family seek God's guidance and providence in this mission.



## CEREMONY BEYOND WORDS

Congress Elders, Aunty Girlie, Eva and Millie recently met with forty Sister's from the Catholic Order, Sisters of St. Joseph, at Risdon Cove in Hobart.

The Sisters began their international gathering with their historic reconciliation ceremony at the site of the first landing of the British colony, and the first massacre of Aboriginal people in Tasmania. The ceremony began alongside the different monuments that commemorate the landing of Lt. Bowen in September 1803, and the Aboriginal community's reclamation of the site in 1995.

*"...the pain of our history is more than words can tell, our response must also be more than words..."*



Congress Elders sharing their experiences with the Sisters of St. Joseph in a 'ceremony beyond words'.

With a mix of words, prayer, gifts, song and dance, the Sister's spoke of their commitment to healing relationships, "the pain of our history is more than words can tell, our response must also be more than words."

This gathering was a further step in the growing relationship between Congress, which is the only Indigenous church in Tasmania, and the Catholic Church. The Catholic Archbishop, Adrian Doyle, is committed to further actions in reconciliation following last year's very successful "Message Stick" activities to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Pope John Paul 2's speech in Alice Springs.

These activities, and others, continue Congress' relationships with other Christian Churches and faith communities as we work together to build greater understanding and respect as a reconciling community.

Rev Grant Finlay



# NARANA FEST 2007

Narana Creations in partnership with fashion tee-shirt clothing company GHANDA and local musician Xavier Rudd have had another very successful, Narana Fest. Although organizers were faced with a limited timeframe in the lead up to the actual concert day on the Easter Monday 9th April, the festival went exceptionally well with support from local schools including the Geelong College.

The crowd numbers were comparable to last years inaugural Narana Fest with close to 2000 people once again attending in perfect weather conditions to see some fine music including the likes of Aboriginal performers Kutcha Edwards and Dan Sultan along side our own staff member Norm Stanley as he entertained the crowd with his didgeridoo performance. Also performing were local up and coming musicians - Jacks Castle and Rob Sawyer.

This year Xavier Rudd performed with some young Aboriginal dancers and later on in the evening he had his brothers Zac and Iggy performing on stage with him.

Narana Fest is just one practical expression of the reconciliatory work of Congress as it aims to build a heightened understanding of Indigenous culture and importantly the rich teachings that can be applied to one's life.



Xavier Rudd entertains the crowd with stunning Indigenous cultural performances from Aboriginal youth.



NARANA CREATIONS IS AN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM & EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISE THAT IS COMMITTED TO PROVIDING AN INTRODUCTORY INSIGHT INTO INDIGENOUS CULTURE.

Nearly 2000 people attended Narana Fest 2007.



Kutcha Edwards and UAICC National Chairperson Vince Ross at Narana Fest 2007.

## FACT FILE

NARANA CREATIONS' GALLERY STOCKS GENUINE 100% ABORIGINAL ART & CRAFT.

NARANA HAS A FINE VARIETY OF PRINTED PANELS AND HAND PAINTED CANVASES, DIDGERIDOOS, BOOMERANGS, CLAP STICK, BOOKS, EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND NATIVE FOODS.

ALL PROCEEDS FROM SALES OF NARANA PRODUCT ARE GUARANTEED TO SUPPORT THE WIDER WORK OF THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN SKILLS AND STRIVE AFTER THEIR OWN GOALS OF SELF-DETERMINATION.



## CAMP COORONG



The foundations for a significant and influential year for positively influencing youth was officially launched by UAICC South Australia in January with the Salisbury (Adelaide) congregation of Congress travelling to Camp Coorong (two hours south of Adelaide). Congress recognises the importance that education and positive diversionary activities can play in equipping Indigenous youth for a purposeful future and as such, camps such as Camp Coorong are vital in this mission.



Camp Coorong was attended by the UAICC South Australia in addition to friends and family from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankatjatjara (APY) lands. The camp was also the official launch of the project funded by the Forsyth Foundation and Wesley 4 Training (all part of Uniting Care Wesley), which aims to help people from the APY lands settle into life in

Adelaide. The project uses the medium of art (painting) and music to build bridges with the people so that the issues they face in moving to the city can be addressed.

The Project officer who has worked tirelessly on the settlement project and the organisation of youth camps is Mr. Nelson "Snooky" Varcoe who is also a music leader at the Salisbury Congress church. Minister, Rev. Dean Whittaker is pleased with the way the project is starting to address the issues which have and continue to affect people from the APY Lands. "Everything is coming together and after a lot of hard preliminary work results are now showing. We look forward to building on these successes as we work to influence positive change in the lives of Indigenous people", he said.



Camp participants partake in group team building exercises.



## NEW ARNHEM AREA COUNCIL

In April, Maningrida congregation played host to the first meeting of the recently-created West Arnhem Area Council which is comprised of congregations in the West Arnhem communities of Minjilang (Croker Is), Warruwi (Goulburn Is) and Maningrida.

Rita Djitmu from Maningrida was elected as Convenor of the Area Council. Rita was commissioned by Rev Bilanya Garawirtja during a service of worship at the conclusion of the meeting.



Revs Jovilisi Ragata, Bilanya Garawirtja & Djawanydjawany Gondarra during the commissioning service for Rita Djitmu.

The West Arnhem Area Council now has four congregations following its decision in April to include Jabiru as part of the West Arnhem ministry region. Jabiru congregation has been part of Pilgrim Presbytery of North Australia (PPNA) since 1986 but discussions between NRCC, Frontier Services and (PPNA) have recognized that change is needed due to the fact that the continuing membership of the congregation is mostly Aboriginal.



Maningrida congregation members outside church.

A new partnership is being formed between NRCC, Frontier Services and (PPNA) to support the ministry at Jabiru and the surrounding region as well as resourcing the other NRCC congregations in the West Arnhem region. As Congress seeks to expand its ministry and outreach activities the new West Arnhem Area Council will be in a robust position to coordinate and drive this mission.



## BEANGANING KWUURT

The UAICC with the support of the Uniting Church in Australia is establishing the Beanganing Kwuurt Institute ("BKI") to provide services to Aboriginal people from the site of the former Sister Kate's Children's Home at Queens Park in Perth.

(BKI) is being established as an Aboriginal-controlled corporation. It will be incorporated as an instrumentality of the Uniting Church in Australia - WA Synod pursuant to the Uniting Church in Australia Act 1976 (WA).

(BKI's) Governing Board comprises Aboriginal leaders with wide experience in the education, women's services, legal, employment, youth, health, and other service sectors, and is chaired by Reverend Sealín Garlett, Chairperson of the WA Regional Committee of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

"Beanganing" is Nyungar for the beginning of a new day, the part of the day when the sky begins to come light, but before the sun has risen. "Kwuurt" is Nyungar for "heart".



Collaboration - some (BKI) Board Members and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs for Western Australia (centre) Mrs Michelle Roberts MP.

Upon incorporation, (BKI) will have title to about 4 hectares of land. The land contains a variety of buildings, including two former student hostels, two cottages, an office building, the former kitchen/laundry building, and a small hall.

BKI plans to use these resources to deliver three types of services, child and family services, museum, education, and conference services and training and employment services.

In its quest for a collaborative and sustainable approach to its service delivery, the Institute is forging plans to establish a long-term partnership with the Western Australian government to both share knowledge and to jointly examine opportunities to affect greater positive change to the lives of Indigenous people.



## ETERNAL LIFE FELLOWSHIP

The vision of Eternal Life Fellowship is to minister holistically to the people of Gordonvale (near Cairns) and surrounding districts, responding to the material, social and spiritual needs of the people, encouraging people and developing their gifts and abilities.

One practical way that vision is lived out is through our activities one of which is the need for afterschool care in a supportive learning environment. The foundation for this program has evolved over the last few years by some of the fellowship members initially volunteering to provide a place of hospitality and welcome to the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP's) Indigenous participants and their families, or for whoever drops in.



The afterschool homework program provides a supportive and caring learning environment.

It was a natural transition from this activity to develop the after-school drop in room where many local children come for afternoon tea, bible story telling and a talk with the volunteers, while they wait for their parents to finish work. This after school drop-in program is now developing into a progressive after school homework program where students can concentrate on their studies in a supportive stimulating environment.

Our vision relies upon us having relationships of trust and care with the local people, including the young ones. We pray that for the young ones that comes to the after-school drop in that each one will be encouraged, develop their gifts, and through this may come to know that Christ's love is intended for all.

### FACT FILE

GORDONVALE IS A SMALL SUGAR MILLING TOWN 24 KM SOUTH OF CAIRNS. THE TOWN IS WHERE THE INFAMOUS CANE TOAD WAS FIRST INTRODUCED TO AUSTRALIA IN 1935 THANKS TO THE MISGUIDED BELIEF IT WOULD CONTROL SUGAR CANE BEETLE.

"WALSH'S PYRAMID" IS A STEEP 922M PYRAMID SHAPED HILL AND IS AN OUTSTANDING GEOGRAPHICAL SITE MARKING THE TOWN. THE TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL OWNERS OF THE PYRAMID ARE THE YIDINYJI-MALANBARRA CLAN WHO REFER TO IT AS "DJARRAGUN": THE MOUND OF DJARRUGA, THE SCRUB HEN.



## COMMISSIONING OF RODNEY MINNIECON

On a balmy evening in May about sixty people gathered under the stars and mango tree in the yard of the Brisbane Congress congregations' Zillmere church and hall, to praise, pray and celebrate the commissioning of Rodney Minniecon as their new Pastor. Many in the Congress and wider Christian church fellowship know Rodney through his outreach and evangelism rallies, meetings and programs. The night featured praise singing and prayer, and prior to the commissioning, greetings from members of Rodney's family, and ministers from Cape York. Rodney then shared his vision for the ministry in Zillmere using fishing as an analogy to men and women in the work of the ministry.



Pastor Rodney Minniecon (second from left) with family and friends at his commissioning.

"We are praying that when we catch fish, clean the fish and cook the fish from our boat (this church) those people will be used in the ministry of saving souls and testifying of the power of God and will become a blessing to other people. When people change, they become the witness of what Jesus can do in the lives of all people. That's what we have to do my brothers and sisters, claim this place in Jesus name. That's my vision. That's what God has given me", he said.

Rev. Shayne Blackman then commissioned Rodney as the pastor with the people in Zillmere and Brisbane and concluded the ceremony by saying, "we pray that Rodney will be blessed and be a blessing. It is a huge task and challenge ahead of him and everyone here. Without a spirit we are dead. Social change is just that, social change - it can come and go, but when a person's spirit is renewed and restored, that change is forever. We all give thanks to God that you have taken up the call to serve here. May God continue to bless the ministry of the Brisbane Congress congregation".

- Andy King



## CONGRESS ELDERS REFLECTION



### ELISHA'S DOTHAN EXPERIENCE

"Lord, granttous Yourdivinerevelation, inspiration and illumination."

Many would have heard me pray this prayer many times – maybe you're tired of hearing it yet again. But I'm reminded of the experiences of Elisha.

While in the city of Dothan, he and his servant woke up to see themselves surrounded by the massive army of the 'enraged' king of Aram. Elisha's servant only saw the chariots and soldiers and was justifiably terrified. Elisha, however, saw something very different... "the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around." This revelation and illumination that Elisha had been given by God, took in the spiritual as well as the natural dimensions of the conflict. It meant that Elisha had no fear of the seemingly disastrous situation confronting himself and the city. Furthermore, God gave Elisha a strategy to deal with the conflict. As a result Elisha prayed and the enemy were blinded and easily captured. This opened up an opportunity to feed them, win them over and eventually have them released and returned to their homes. A really staggering victory! A win-win situation for all involved!

I believe that Congress also has a wonderful opportunity to see as Elisha did – to see the deep things of God and look beyond the physical and natural and see the spiritual realities impacting on communities. Governments of today, in the main, are focused on surface issues. They pour money and effort into physical and natural programs and wonder why there are so few lasting changes for the better.

Like Elisha, we too have been given the possibility of creating win-win situations in communities by praying "Lord, open our eyes so that we may see". As in the Elisha story we need to have our eyes opened to understand what is really happening – to see and understand the spiritual factors as well as the physical and natural. We also need to see the spiritual resources, power and guaranteed victory offered to the followers of Christ.

Pastor Bill Hollingsworth



MESSAGE STICK IS PRODUCED BY THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF THE UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER CHRISTIAN CONGRESS.

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