

## LETTER FROM ANGLICARE VICTORIA AND THE LONG WALK: **WHY CULTURE MATTERS**

### **Dear Friends, Students, and Partners,**

As we prepare to close out the year for the Buldau Yioohgen – Big Dreams Leadership Academy, we've been thinking a lot about the importance of culture—and why it's integral that Aboriginal young people feel connected to their culture, history, spirituality, people, and country.

It is well known that Aboriginal people have one of the oldest continuous cultures on Earth. They are the world's original explorers—curious, courageous, and strong.

Today, Aboriginal people are some of the world's most resilient people; surviving colonisation, genocide, displacement, persecution, and ongoing discrimination. Importantly, Aboriginal cultures have survived, and we see traditional values thriving, as new generations reinvent cultures through stories, dance, music, art, fashion, commerce, and more.

At Buldau Yioohgen, we believe culture is paramount. It gives kids a strong sense of identity,

it connects them with their communities, and it builds their pride and confidence so they have the foundation to pursue their big dreams.

That's why we emphasise culture through our program. We want to help Buldau Yioohgen academy members, wherever they are at on the continuum, on their cultural journey.

We also want to help our professional partners understand, appreciate, and embrace Aboriginal culture in their organisations.

And we want to continue to learn about what culture means—to individuals and to Australia more broadly—through the connections we are making in the Buldau Yioohgen program.

In this edition of the newsletter, we explore culture in depth. We sit down for a chat with The Long Walk's General Manager, Leanne Brooke, and profile Buldau Yioohgen alum, Jake Firebrace, who is the first Aboriginal intern at Tennis Australia through Buldau Yioohgen.

We also talk with tennis legend and Buldau Yioohgen Cultural Advisor Ian Goolagong about how he uses his own life experience and cultural journey to help kids connect with their traditional values.

Thank you for taking the time to read these stories and learn more about the role of culture in our program.

We would love to hear from you: Please get in touch if you want to learn more about Buldau Yioohgen.

Warmly,

**Paul McDonald**, Anglicare Victoria CEO, and **Leanne Brooke**, General Manager, The Long Walk



# CONVERSATION WITH THE LONG WALK'S GENERAL MANAGER LEANNE BROOKE: A PROGRAM BUILT ON CULTURE

Outside the Essendon Football Club stands a statue of legendary AFL player, Michael Long, who walked from Melbourne to Canberra in 2004 to ask Prime Minister John Howard to demonstrate love for Aboriginal people.

"As the leader of this country, Prime Minister, you are the only person who can give permission to the Australian people in communities across Australia to embrace us," he wrote in a letter to Mr Howard.

Today, as a partner of Buldau Yioohgen, The Long Walk is carrying forward Michael Long's legacy by supporting Aboriginal young people to connect with and embrace their culture.

In this conversation, Leanne Brooke, a Gunditjamaara woman with family and land connections in Western Victoria, discusses why culture is so critical, and how just one person—backed by the oldest continuous culture on Earth—can make a difference in their community.

**When you first got involved with Buldau Yioohgen, you said it was critical that the program was "underpinned by culture." What did you mean by that?**

I wanted to make sure the program was built on the Aboriginal ways of doing and knowing. In simple terms, it's about respecting and acknowledging us as the First Peoples of this country. It's acknowledging and respecting our sovereignty. It's also respecting self-determination—letting us be in control of our own destinies and to

make decisions based on what we know to be in our best interest, what we know works for us.

It was really important to me that Aboriginal people were involved to ensure the way that we approach the program, how it's delivered and the program content, was underpinned by culture.

In everything we do, it's really important that it comes from a place of strength and positivity. It demonstrates and highlights the fact that we are resilient and proud people. I'm a very strong advocate of self-determination, and there's evidence that when initiatives are Aboriginal-designed and Aboriginal people are central to their delivery, you get really good outcomes.

**In your opinion, what is this program all about—what is it doing for young people?**

This program is about building resilience and instilling pride in our young people—providing them with opportunities, connecting them, and giving them the confidence to be active participants in their community.

When Aboriginal young people are strong in culture, active in their communities, and have a strong sense of identity, they're healthy and they're happy.

Our young people are constantly hearing this message that we're underachievers, that we're lacking in this way, we're not completing school, we're not going on to university, we're unemployed, we're incarcerated.

I think when you're constantly hearing that, and you're not hearing the positives, you can start to believe the negatives. But when you are connected to your Aboriginal community and family, you get to see amazing things. You get to see people who are successful and achieving, and you get to feel all those wonderful things that being part of a community brings: a sense of belonging, a strong sense of identity, and a sense of pride because you're actively participating.

**What's your favourite part of the program?**

One of the things I love about the program is that it's aspirational. It's saying, "You can be whatever you want to be."

When I'm talking to young people, I always remind them that they're strong. As Aboriginal people, we're strong, proud and resilient people. We've been here 60,000-plus years. We have survived. You've got the blood of your ancestors and warriors running through you—you can achieve anything. Even in your darkest times when you think you may not be able to, look to your Elders, and think about how we're still here.

**As part of the program, the young people who participate return to their communities as leaders and mentors. How do you identify kids with that potential?**

When I'm selecting young people for the program, I'm looking for young people who are passionate and who have a strong desire to learn more



about their culture and community, if that's an area that's lacking.

If not, I look for young people who want to give back, who want to make a difference. I think fostering a sense of service in young people is really, really important.

**Buldau Yioohgen partners with a number of iconic Australian institutions. What do you look for in partners?**

In partners, it's really important they're likeminded: They want to see Aboriginal young people achieve, and they want to provide experiences and opportunities. It's important that they see the value in this work.

For a lot of the people we work with, their exposure and connection with Aboriginal people and communities has been limited, but that hasn't stopped them. They have a passion for wanting to make the connections, and they have a passion for wanting to make a difference.

We want to bring partners on board who understand that Aboriginal people are at the heart of this program—that we have a lot of input, and we know what's best for our people. They have to be prepared to be able to listen.

**What do you hope partners take away from this experience?**

For one, I hope it increases their understanding.

I hope it lights a fire within them to want to learn more, so it's a catalyst for them to do more within their organisation. Not just externally, partnering on programs or initiatives, but internally as an organisation—organisational change.

Even though the focus of this program is around young people, if it leads to positive organisational change among our partners—in terms of cultural safety, increased awareness, and increased Aboriginal people employed—that's fantastic as well.

One of the things we are doing with partners is educating them about Aboriginal people and building connections. We're educating people about the diversity of Indigenous Australia—there are strong Aboriginal people and communities in their own backyard. And we're supporting the organisations to make connections with Aboriginal organisation and communities, wherever they are based.

**And what's your hope for the young people who graduate from this program?**

I hope they go out and do whatever makes them happy. I hope they go out and achieve their dreams, whether that's working in a particular area, playing football, becoming a teacher, or working in their community.

I'd like to see them aspiring to make a passionate contribution to the world—and knowing they can do that. I want them to be confident and say, "I can do this. I can drive positive change, whether it's in my family, whether it's in my school, whether it's in the community, whether it's in the world."

Just like Michael Long, one person can make a difference.

## OPENING DOORS AT TENNIS AUSTRALIA: MEET BULDAU YIOOHGEN ALUM JAKE FIREBRACE

On a sunny Friday morning in Spring, the sleek lines of Tennis HQ—Tennis Australia's head office in Melbourne Park—appear to slice through the blue sky.

Inside, it's bright and busy, with sunlight streaming in through enormous windows and Tennis Australia staff grabbing coffees and hustling off for their last workday of the week.

On the eighth floor, the very top of HQ, Jake Firebrace is about to start his weekly work placement day. At 18, Firebrace, a Yorta Yorta and Wurundjeri man, is the first Indigenous intern at Tennis Australia through Buldau Yioohgen. He began his internship several weeks earlier, after participating in the Buldau Yioohgen program in September.

A sporty young man, who trained with the Essendon Football Club's James Hird Academy and competed in the AFL under-18s championships, Firebrace said his interest in Tennis Australia was sparked during the Buldau Yioohgen Northern Experience.

In Darwin, the program's participants joined Tennis Australia's inaugural National Indigenous Tennis Carnival.

"It was great to see the smiles on the kids' faces and see more Indigenous youth getting to play out there," Firebrace said.

"It's a great sport, and it's great to see it become more inclusive for Indigenous youth."

In Darwin, Firebrace had a chance to meet tennis legends Evonne Goolagong Cawley and Ian Goolagong, as well as Nova Peris, the first Aboriginal Australian to win an Olympic gold medal as part of the women's hockey team in Atlanta in 1996.

"Just hearing her story, how she had that strong resilience and passion and never gave up makes me believe it's possible for people to achieve their dreams," Firebrace said.

### Confidence Based on a Foundation of Culture

Upon returning to year 12, Firebrace knew he needed to fulfill his work-placement requirement for his Victoria Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), and he said his experience in Buldau Yioohgen gave him the confidence to ask about interning at **Tennis Australia**.



While work-placement internships are not a required part of Buldau Yioohgen partnerships, Anglicare Victoria's David Law thought it would be a good opportunity for both Firebrace and Tennis Australia, so he worked with Tennis Australia's National Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator, Jay Schuback, to create a place for Firebrace.

Today, Firebrace is based in Tennis Australia's human resources department, but he also spends time with different teams, including public relations and media.

"We're trying to give him some opportunities throughout the business, and let him spend some days with different departments to see and learn what they do, and maybe find his passion," Schuback said.

"If there's a particular area that he enjoys, then we can see if we can get him some paid work here further down the track. It's really about opening doors, giving these young people an opportunity, and helping them find their passion."

Firebrace said he was nervous when he first started, but as someone who was raised with a strong spiritual connection to his culture, history, and country, he used that cultural identity as a source of strength to give him confidence in a new environment.

"It's something that's always with me and something that nurtured me through my childhood, so I just rely back on it to feel confident and strong," he said.

Now, Firebrace feels comfortable working alongside the Tennis Australia staff every Friday.

"I like meeting new people and networking with people," he said.

"It's a great experience, and I know I'll take the knowledge I gain from this and the information I retain into whatever job I get in the future."

What will that future look like? Firebrace smiled at that question.

"Well, it's to play AFL, obviously," he said, adding, "but if I don't make AFL, I'd love to be a youth worker and work with Indigenous kids."

### Opening Doors for Aboriginal Youth and Tennis Australia

In addition to opening doors for Firebrace, the internship has opened doors for Tennis Australia to expand its representation of Indigenous employees and to learn and grow from the experience of connecting with **more Aboriginal people**.



"To be able to bring Jake into the workplace has been a fantastic learning experience for us, and it would be great to offer these opportunities to more Indigenous youth," Schuback said.

"Once we gave Jake that opportunity, there's a real passion and drive, and we're sure there are other young people in similar situations that may also benefit."

Leanne Brooke, General Manager of The Long Walk, which partnered with Anglicare Victoria to create Buldau Yioohgen, said representation at places like Tennis Australia is critical to encourage more Aboriginal youth to see themselves in these roles.

"You can't be what you can't see," she said.

*Buldau Yioohgen partners with leading Australian institutions, including the Australian National Academy of Music, Federation University Australia, Opera Australia, and Tennis Australia. As part of the program, participants meet with different leaders and employees to learn about the varied roles at our partner institutions. These connections give our partners a chance to learn about the interests and aspirations of the young people—opening doors on both sides. For more information about partnering with Buldau Yioohgen, please contact [info@anglicarevic.org.au](mailto:info@anglicarevic.org.au) and [by@anglicarevic.org.au](mailto:by@anglicarevic.org.au).*

# HOW IAN GOOLAGONG HELPS KIDS CONNECT WITH CULTURE

As an Aboriginal Elder, Ian Goolagong has an important story to tell.

In many ways, Goolagong's story is extraordinary: The second-youngest of eight kids born into the only Aboriginal family in the tiny town of Barellan, New South Wales, he was 21 when he became the first Aboriginal man to play tennis at Wimbledon. (To this day, no other Aboriginal man has competed at Wimbledon.)

Throughout his tennis career, Goolagong played and coached at prestigious tennis institutions, including the John Newcombe Tennis Ranch in Texas and the Harry Hopman Academy in Florida. He is now the National Indigenous Coach for Tennis Australia, and has served as an Indigenous Communities Officer for the City of Whittlesea, north of Melbourne.

In other ways, Goolagong's story is not unusual: As a Wiradjuri man, he has experienced times in his life when he has been disconnected from culture, times when he has faced discrimination, and times when he has experienced the effects of generational trauma resulting from the persecution, genocide, and dislocation of Aboriginal people. But through his cultural journey over the years, he has used his deep cultural connection as a source of strength.

Today, as a Cultural Advisor to the Buldau Yioohgen program, Goolagong shares his life experience—from his tennis journey to his cultural journey—to support Aboriginal young people on their cultural journey and help them become leaders.

"The whole idea is to try and help them instill confidence and make them into leaders so they can go back and help their community," he said.

Goolagong's approach to working with Buldau Yioohgen kids is instinctive. He talks about his life, he shares stories about Aboriginal culture and lore, and he listens to the kids, trying to understand where they are at on their cultural journey and how he can best support them. He also mixes in some of what he learned as a tennis coach.

## Goolagong's Story

Goolagong's own story began in 1960. His family lived across the lane from the rundown court at the Barellan War Memorial Tennis Club, and he jokes that he picked up a racquet for the first time before he was born. All of his siblings played tennis, including Evonne, who later became one of Australia's most acclaimed players, winning several grand slam titles. When Goolagong was 13, he moved in with his aunt and uncle in Melbourne, where he could train more seriously. At 18, he flew to the United States, where he received a scholarship to play tennis at a state university in Texas.

In the U.S., Goolagong was fully ensconced in the elite world of tennis, training at famous institutions and eventually travelling to England to compete with Evonne at Wimbledon. Due to this experience, Goolagong said he was disconnected from his traditional culture. And as something of a celebrity, he was protected from the racism that many Aboriginal people and people of colour face in Australia, the U.S., and the U.K.

"I grew up living in Evonne's shadow, so everywhere I went, as soon as they realised I was Evonne's brother, their attitude changed," he recalled.

"There was also no discrimination in America because no one knew where I was from."

After Goolagong returned to Australia in 1981, he began a journey back to culture. It started when he went out bush with some mates, and continued when he met Elder, Uncle Paul, in Melbourne.

"The first time I went to ceremony, I learned certain rules, and I've been living by those rules ever since—they help me get through life," he said.

"Whenever I'm in trouble, I go back to those rules."

Those rules have helped Goolagong deal with the discrimination he has encountered as an adult—the extra "Aboriginal tax" he has gotten at the car-rental counter, for instance—and they have helped him cope with the generational trauma that Goolagong said he sees many Aboriginal young people still struggling with today.

"Most Aboriginal kids feel like second-class citizens because that's how they have been treated," Goolagong said.

"They're still going through life not knowing who they are, and they're going to feel like second-class citizens—like they have this chip on their shoulder—until they are able to feel equal."

Goolagong wants to give them the foundation in culture to understand that the opposite is true—that they are part of a strong, resilient culture, and that knowing and connecting with culture can give them confidence.

## Helping Kids Develop Cultural Tools

At Buldau Yioohgen, Goolagong uses stories from his life to help the kids culturally—to, as he puts it, "learn them up."

"Everything I have done—growing up in Barellan, living in America, travelling around the world, working at Tennis Australia and at the Whittlesea Council, learning about my culture, about myself, and about men's and women's business—I understand a lot about how the kids feel," Goolagong said.

"I've been able to do all of the stuff I have done and then come back to my culture."

A critical part of what Goolagong teaches kids is that culture is always there for them, and he wants to help them find their own pathway between culture and their aspirations in life.

"You never really lose your culture," he said.

"A lot of kids know their culture, but they are still trying to fit in somewhere, and they're not really sure how to. That's where I come in: I try to help them work through that."

Goolagong describes his work with kids as helping them develop the cultural tools they can use throughout their lives.

"You have to install a tool they can fall back on and steer them in the right direction," he said.

"The trick is to find that tool."

That's where Goolagong's experience coaching tennis comes into play: That cultural tool, like a trademark tennis stroke, is different for everyone, so he tries different approaches to help kids find the tool that will work best for them.



"In tennis, if you try and coach one person a different way of hitting a forehand, and they can't do what you're asking them to do, then you throw in a little story, and they think about that story, and then they come at it from a different angle," he explained.

In much the same way, Goolagong adapts his approach to teaching culture with the young people in Buldau Yioohgen.

Ultimately, Goolagong believes that once young people have found the cultural tool that works for them, it's something they can use to help others—which means his one-on-one work with Aboriginal young people can have a ripple effect.

To make this point, he draws a comparison between the Aboriginal kinship system and the human body.

"If one of the communities is like the liver, and the liver fails, the rest of the body fails," he explained.

"We've got to make sure everyone is working within the community to keep the community stable, and then they can work with other communities across Australia."

Anglicare Victoria values diversity and inclusivity. As part of demonstrating this commitment, Anglicare Victoria will be undertaking Rainbow Tick Accreditation in 2019. The standards assesses the extent to which our organisation, and the services it offers, is inclusive of the needs of the LGBTIQ community. The Anglicare Victoria PRIDE (Promoting Respect and Inclusivity for Diversity and Equality) Working Group members are working closely with all organisational departments to achieve this accreditation. If you would like some information about Rainbow Tick Accreditation, please email [AVPRIDE@anglicarevic.org.au](mailto:AVPRIDE@anglicarevic.org.au)

[anglicarevic.org.au](http://anglicarevic.org.au)



OUR FOCUS IS ON TRANSFORMING  
THE FUTURES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE, FAMILIES AND ADULTS. OUR WORK  
IS BASED ON THREE GUIDING PILLARS,  
PREVENT, PROTECT, EMPOWER.

**BETTER  
TOMORROWS**