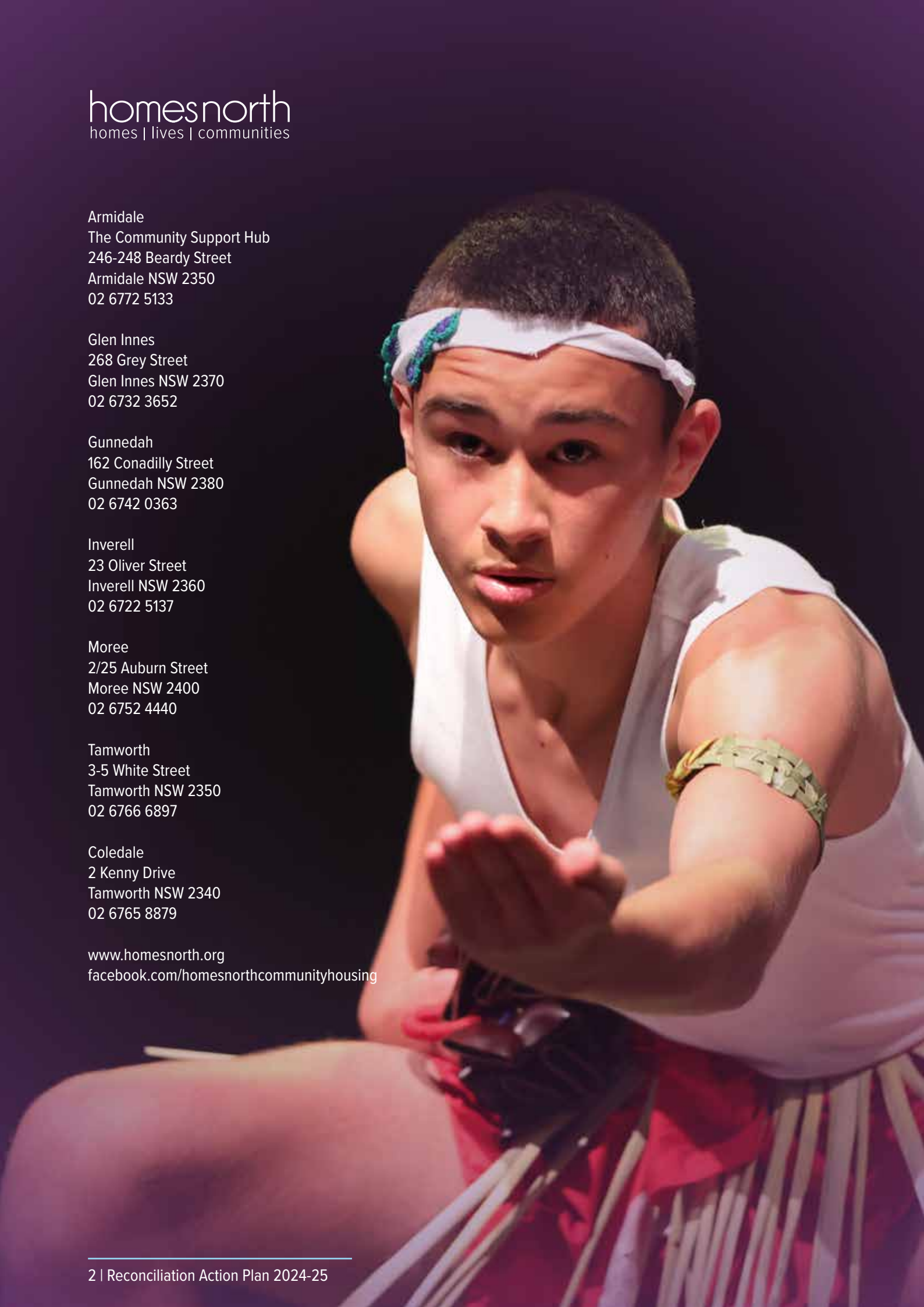
homesnorth
homes | lives | communities

INNOVATE
Reconciliation Action Plan
1 October 2025 – 30 September 2027

RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN
INNOVATE

homesnorth
homes | lives | communities



Armidale
The Community Support Hub
246-248 Beardy Street
Armidale NSW 2350
02 6772 5133

Glen Innes
268 Grey Street
Glen Innes NSW 2370
02 6732 3652

Gunnedah
162 Conadilly Street
Gunnedah NSW 2380
02 6742 0363

Inverell
23 Oliver Street
Inverell NSW 2360
02 6722 5137

Moree
2/25 Auburn Street
Moree NSW 2400
02 6752 4440

Tamworth
3-5 White Street
Tamworth NSW 2350
02 6766 6897

Coledale
2 Kenny Drive
Tamworth NSW 2340
02 6765 8879

www.homesnorth.org
facebook.com/homesnorthcommunityhousing

CONTENTS

Acknowledgement of Country 4

Statement from CEO of Reconciliation Australia ... 5

Message from the CEO 6

Message from the Chair 7

About our Artists 8

Statement of Recognition and Commitment 10

Our Purpose & Our Business 12

Our Region 12

Our Vision Statement 13

Our Mission 13

Our Values 14

Our Vision for Reconciliation 15

Our Reconciliation Action Plan Aims 15

Our Aims as a Community Housing Provider 16

Our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 18

Our Reconciliation Action Plan Committee Members 21

Our Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group Members 21

Relationships 22

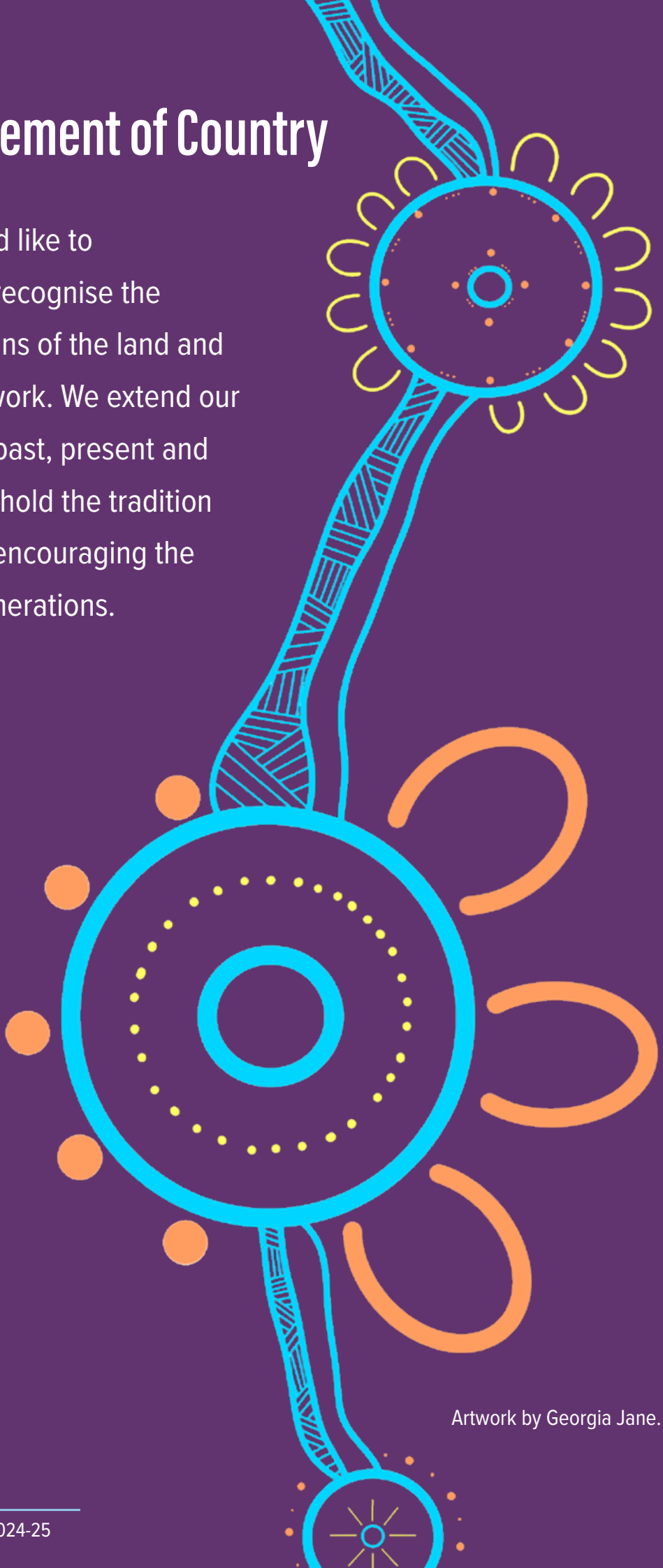
Respect 25

Opportunities 27

Governance 29

Acknowledgement of Country

Homes North would like to acknowledge and recognise the traditional custodians of the land and waters where we work. We extend our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the tradition and culture, while encouraging the hopes of future generations.



Artwork by Georgia Jane.

Statement from CEO of Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia commends Homes North Community Housing (Homes North) on the formal endorsement of its third Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.

With close to 3 million people now either working or studying in an organisation with a RAP, the program's potential for impact is greater than ever. Homes North continues to be part of a strong network of more than 3,000 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have taken goodwill and transformed it into action.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously strengthen reconciliation commitments and constantly strive to apply learnings in new ways.

An Innovate RAP is a crucial and rewarding period in an organisation's reconciliation journey. It is a time to build the strong foundations and relationships that ensure sustainable, thoughtful, and impactful RAP outcomes into the future.

An integral part of building these foundations is reflecting on and cataloguing the successes and challenges of previous RAPs. Learnings gained through effort and innovation are invaluable resources that Homes North will continuously draw upon to create RAP commitments rooted in experience and maturity.

These learnings extend to Homes North using the lens of reconciliation to better understand its core business, sphere of influence, and diverse community of staff and stakeholders.

The RAP program's emphasis on relationships, respect, and opportunities gives organisations a framework from which to foster connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rooted in mutual collaboration and trust.

This Innovate RAP is an opportunity for Homes North to strengthen these relationships, gain crucial experience, and nurture connections that will become the lifeblood of its future RAP commitments. By enabling and empowering staff to contribute to this process, Homes North will ensure shared and cooperative success in the long-term.

Gaining experience and reflecting on pertinent learnings will ensure the sustainability of Homes North's future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, providing meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations Homes North on your third Innovate RAP and I look forward to following your ongoing reconciliation journey.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia

Message from the CEO

It is a privilege to introduce Homes North's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). Homes North commenced work toward our first RAP in 2016. Over the years of developing and implementing our RAPs it has become clear that we must approach this work with care and awareness. For this reason, we now consider our RAP journey a winding road rather than a linear one.

We have looked carefully at our progress and reconciled this with the aims of developing and implementing a RAP. We have decided we still have much fundamental work to do before transitioning to a Stretch level RAP. Although we have a desire to embed reconciliation into our organisation, and have achieved our previous RAP actions, there have been challenges in maintaining progress with the impacts of COVID and the damaging "no" result of the 2023 Australian Indigenous Voice Referendum. In our 2025-27 RAP we have considered the further hurt and division caused by the vote process and outcome, the permission it gives many Australians to ignore the truths of the past and the need for reconciliation. We have also considered staff turnover that occurred because of the disruption of COVID and acknowledged that as new community members enter our service our capacity to truly achieve our RAP aspirations are challenged, as to some extent the work begins anew at an individual level.

In this RAP our actions aim to ensure we have a strong foundation to truly embed reconciliation into our organisation. I am deeply grateful to our RAP Committee and RAP Working Group members for standing up, committing themselves and delivering this important work.

Maree McKenzie
Chief Executive Officer

Message from the Chair

Providing housing is a basic building block for any person to be able to take up opportunities in their life. It is, however, only a step on the path. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that path is longer and has more obstacles.

Homes North is a significant provider of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We know how to do housing, but we do acknowledge the poor history of Australia's dealings with, and the poor record of service outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We know that we need to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and listen; we know we need to be nimble and prepared to change; we know that successful housing only happens for people who are able to participate fully as community members.

We also know that we do not have all the answers, but we are prepared to go on a journey with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; we are prepared to listen; we are prepared to change; we have plan and a process.

We are not prepared to be satisfied with current outcomes, and this plan is a road map for respect and to better service.

Ken Bone
Chair

Gomeroi Dance Company, NAIDOC Week 2024 Debutante Ball, Tamworth.

About Our Artists

SHAKAYLA SPEARIM

Shakayla is a young Aboriginal artist from Tamworth with a passion for art and her culture. Shakayla's artwork features on our Aboriginal uniform and is featured on the cover of this Reconciliation Action Plan.

About Shakayla's Artwork

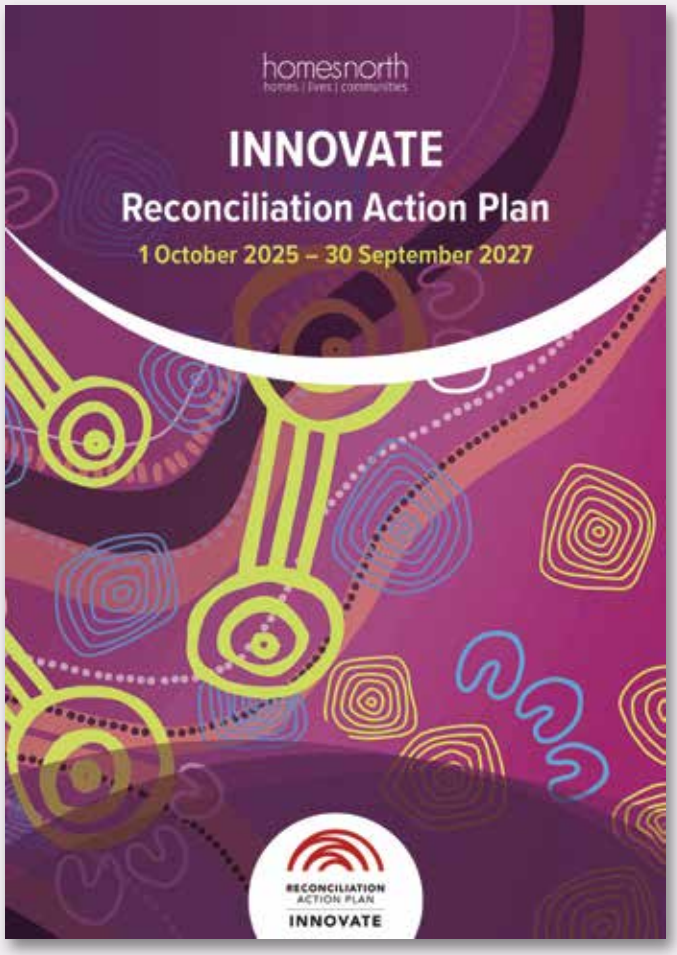
The multiple circles represent different groups, families and communities.

The meeting places are connected together. They represent a safe environment for people to connect and live in.

The patterns in the background symbolise different struggles and challenges people face but also how they grow from those challenges in their life when they open up about it.

The yellow symbols represent individuals that help those in need.

Below: Sample uniform front and back.
Right: Reconciliation Action Plan front cover.



GEORGIA JANE

Georgia is an early career emerging artist based in Tamworth and is a proud young Gomeroi woman. Georgia is currently studying a Bachelor of Social Work at University where she wishes to combine her ambitions and passion between social work and arts practice, using arts as a vehicle for creative healing and social justice. Georgia works in a contemporary Aboriginal style with mainly canvas and acrylic with a signature stylistic practice of bright and colourful. Georgia's work is inspired by her connection to her Country, family and culture. Georgia is compelled to paint; as she puts paint to canvas she channels her creative spirit. Georgia aims to connect younger generations to culture through the arts in a contemporary lens and increase the visibility of younger Aboriginal artists in the art world.

Georgia's artwork features on our new Acknowledgement of Country cards and is featured throughout this Reconciliation Action Plan.

About Georgia's Artwork

The arches in this work represent the hills and the mountain ranges that spread across our land. The dots over the three different arches represent the different journeys and pathways we walk. The smaller arches represent our close-knit families and communities with the filling of the arches representing the culture we are surrounded by.

The blue motion of lines represent the sea and waters that flow through our land. The dots surrounding are the sun, moon and stars as well as our communities. This work is about always being connected through our land, culture, community and our families.

Left: Front of Acknowledgement Card.
Below: Reverse side of Acknowledgement Card with written and spoken Acknowledgement of Country.

Statement of Recognition and Commitment

- **Homes North acknowledges Traditional Custodians and Owners of the land, the skies and waterways.**
- **We recognise Traditional Custodians' and Owners' continual connection to the land, skies and waterways.**
- **We pay respect to the Elders, past and present.**
- **Homes North recognises, respects and supports the unique culture of Traditional Custodians and Owners, and their right to self-determination and self-sufficiency.**

We at Homes North acknowledge that Traditional Custodians and Owners have suffered from historic injustices as a direct result of colonisation and dispossession of their lands, skies and waterways. Homes North acknowledges the survival, resilience and successes of Traditional Custodians and Owners, families and communities in the face of the devastating impacts of colonisation, dispossession, assimilation and successive policies. This has prevented Traditional Custodians and Owners from their right to social, economic, and domestic development in accordance with their cultural values and beliefs.

We at Homes North are committed to being a change agent to provide culturally sensitive and safe services and programs to our social and affordable housing clients. This includes ongoing cultural awareness education to board members, the executive, staff and broader community. This is Homes North commitment – to be champions of continual development and improvement to achieve cultural proficiency.

Homes North is committed to the common purpose of making a difference that endeavours to empower Traditional Custodians and Owners in this region to stand proud and strong on Country.

Homes North will advocate for the truth telling of genocide in Traditional Custodians and Owners histories and the reprehensible past laws, practices and policies of white colonisation which has and is still causing transgenerational trauma.

Homes North will continue to advocate for equality and equity and is committed to increase our Traditional Custodians and Owners employment which is commensurate with the proportion of Traditional Custodians and Owners community members we serve in our region.

Homes North pledges to honour and pay homage to Traditional Custodians and Owners significant events and celebration dates including but not limited to:

- Survival Day : January 26 : Celebrate the survival of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander families and communities.
- National Sorry Day : 26 May : Celebrate the resilience of the Stolen Generation and acknowledge the forcible removal of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children.
- Reconciliation Week : May annually : Celebration of Cooperation, Partnerships and Diversity.
- Mabo Day : 3 June : Celebration of Mabo Native Title decision.
- NAIDOC Week : July annually : Celebratration of Aboriginal and Torres Islander cultures.
- NSW Koori Knockout : October Long Weekend : Koori Knockout Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Football Carnival Weekend.
- Local significant and commemorative events.

Our Purpose & Our Business

Homes North creates secure, affordable, inclusive and sensitively managed housing opportunities for low income households. Our partnerships and alliances help us provide appropriately designed, well-managed, and affordable accommodation options as well as vital support, building strong and resilient communities.

We operate from offices in Armidale, Glen Innes, Gunnedah, Inverell, Moree, Tamworth, and Coledale. We provide outreach services to Tenterfield, Guyra, Walcha, Tingha, Quirindi, Werris Creek, Barraba, Boggabilla, Lightning Ridge, Mungindi, and Uralla. Services in Narrabri and Wee Waa are provided through our contract with Summit Community Services.

We have operated across the New England North West region for over thirty years. We have over 2,700 tenancies and over 5,200 people living in our homes.

Our Region

As of 30 June 2024:

- 20% of Homes North staff identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 24% of Homes North Board of Directors identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 46% of households identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 67% of the HYPAR program clients identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 61% of the Rent Choice Youth program are identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 68% of the Together Home program clients identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Our Vision Statement

safe homes – empowered lives – strong communities

safe homes
We believe everybody has the right to live in a safe home.

empowered lives
Our business is about connecting people and places, building empowered lives.

strong communities
Our vision is for vibrant, inclusive communities where individual and family wellbeing is a priority.

Our Mission

To disrupt intergenerational disadvantage and isolation by providing safe homes, building community strength and resilience, reducing vulnerability, and breaking cycles of poverty through education and employment pathways.

Homes North's mission spans a continuum from promotion to prevention, where community engagement and empowerment provides the foundation for building strength that leads to reducing vulnerability in our communities.

Our Values

Our Points of Culture (numbers 1 to 6) are the values Homes North strives to exemplify every day. These values are the principles guiding ethical behaviour.

1 **COMMUNICATE**
We will communicate in a positive, clear and concise manner using the appropriate method and tone, listening without judgement.

2 **RESPECT**
We will show respect at all times; valuing our differences and treating people how we want to be treated.

3 **RESPONSIBILITY**
We will take responsibility and ownership of our own behaviour and actions.

4 **GOOD FAITH**
We will act with good faith; consciously choosing to believe that people are acting with good intent, giving them the opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings.

5 **SUPPORTIVE**
We will be supportive and work as a team; showing understanding to one another and providing encouragement.

6 **INTEGRITY**
We will work ethically and with integrity; conducting ourselves professionally, maintaining confidentiality and always being honest.

Armidale National Reconciliation Week Bridge Walk 2024. Each year Homes North works in partnership with other organisations and schools helping to make the event a success.

Our Vision for Reconciliation

At Homes North, we envision a future where reconciliation is woven into the fabric of community housing. Our vision is to foster an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge and perspectives are respected, embraced, and embedded in our everyday work and long-term strategies.

We are committed to building genuine, respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations, and communities. Through collaboration and shared learning, we aim to deliver culturally safe housing services and support strong, connected communities.

Our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan Aims

1 To acknowledge the truth in the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the connection to Country; and acknowledge that since European settlement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have suffered many injustices, leading to disadvantage and exclusion.

2 To play a significant part in supporting true reconciliation that starts from acknowledgement of truth and proceeds to work together to produce outcomes that reflect we are continuing to move forward together.

3 In action to create opportunities for equal access to sustainable, secure and stable housing.

4 To work together with individuals and communities, including Homes North staff, tenants of community housing, and their wider communities, to redress disadvantage and promote inclusion.

5 To achieve this through improvements in social and health outcomes, together with economic outcomes of education, training and employment.

Our Aims as a Community Housing Provider

1 For our community members to be able to independently sustain a home into the future, and as a result improve their wellbeingg.

2 To work with individuals and the community across the promotion-to-prevention continuum that focuses on building strengths and reducing vulnerabilities.

3 To take a long-term and intergenerational outlook to positively change cycles of disadvantage, exclusion and isolation.

4 To provide a secure home that considers the physical, social and economic environment.

5 To ensure true security is achieved when there is a harmony and resilience existing across each of these dimensions.

NAIDOC Week 2024 Photographic Exhibition *Faces of Resilience: Honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stories* showcases portraits and stories of local residents whose contribution to community has ensured the continuation of tradition and culture through their resilience and commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. The exhibition is on permanent display at the Community Support Hub in Armidale.

Homes North recognises tenants, applicants, service providers, partners, the local community, and funding bodies as its primary stakeholders. Homes North is committed to consulting with stakeholders and meeting the needs identified by each local area. Homes North is a key player in various planning forums across the New England North-West, including various Place Teams and housing-focused forums. We work closely with many support agencies to ensure the sustainability of our tenants' tenancies; approximately 20% of our tenants require the assistance of a support agency to live independently.

Homes North is a registered Tier 1 social housing provider under the National Registration System for Community Housing Providers. In May 2019, Homes North increased its housing stock by approximately 1,700 properties making us the largest provider of social housing in the New England North-West region of NSW.

Homes North employs over 100 staff and encourages the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising the unique cultural knowledge and perspectives they bring to our work in community housing.

Through our first Reconciliation Action Plan (2016–2018), we developed an Aboriginal Employment and Support Strategy, outlining our commitment to increasing Aboriginal representation within our workforce to better reflect the communities we serve.

Building on that foundation, our most recent RAP (2021–2023) has seen steady growth in Aboriginal employment, with 20% of staff now identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander demonstrating our ongoing progress toward meaningful representation and inclusion.

> **We recognise the unique place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold within Australia as the First Peoples of this land. We acknowledge, respect and value their rich and diverse cultures and historical significance in this land.**
>
> **Our Reconciliation Action Plan ensures that we continue to focus on the values that are particularly relevant to Reconciliation. We all have a role to play and we are forging strong relationships built on valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and futures."**

Our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan

Homes North has developed our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to recognise and build on current relationships; further demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as applicants, tenants and communities, and develop opportunities to purposefully attract and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and services. Our RAP is an aspirational document of measureable and achieveable actions intended to map our pathway to a future of reconciliation.

In November 2015, Homes North's Board of Directors (Board) made the decision to embark on the process of developing our RAP, endorsing a proposal for Homes North to adopt an Innovate RAP. In April 2016, our RAP Working Group was formed and our first Reconciliation Action Plan (2017-2018) was published in 2016. Since that time, our RAP Working Group has been integral to the delivery of our strategic plan and our CEO has championed and driven internal engagement as our RAP Champion.

We have since formed a permanent RAP Committee that sits between the Board and the Working Group. The RAP Committee provides leadership to the Working Group, reviewing the outcomes of our previous RAPs. The Working Group is now preparing to present our next RAP, building on past actions and identifying new opportunities for meaningful engagement and reconciliation.

All staff who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are invited and encouraged to be part of our RAP Committee. Currently, three committee members identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. In the following section we have documented our progress towards reconciliation.

Our Achievements

1. Endorsement of our Aboriginal Employment and Support Strategy. It underpins our ambition to increase recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff to 20%. We offer traineeships and cadetships to young Aboriginal people in partnership with the Aboriginal Employment Strategy, NSW Government, and the Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA).
2. Endorsement of our Aboriginal Engagement Plan. It recognises the breadth of Aboriginal organisations in our region, mapping the strengths of these connections.
3. New Aboriginal Resident Engagement Groups have been established in Gunnedah and Tamworth to provide culturally informed advice on customer service practices, organizational policies, and tenant-facing materials such as fact sheets.
4. Our procurement practices calculate additional weighting for Supply Nation listed businesses and other non-listed Aboriginal owned businesses as part of the evaluation criteria of all purchases.
5. Homes North recognises regular events associated with National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week and support external events, as well as holding internal events.
6. All staff have an Acknowledgement of Country card ensuring they can confidently acknowledge Country in spoken and written form.

7. Established a list of Elders and culturally appropriate Aboriginal people to speak at events and to give advice on cultural issues.
8. All staff have completed Aboriginal Cultural Competency Standard 2 Historical and Social Factors Inform Practice. Front-facing staff completed Standard 3 Person and Family Centred Practice and Standard 5 Service Delivery and Practice. Standards 2, 3 and 5 are part of 7 Standards (*Aboriginal Cultural Competency Standards: A Self-Assessment Process for Community Housing Providers*) published in June 2016 by the NSW Federation of Housing Associations and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services as part of the Community Housing for Aboriginal People Strategy.
9. Reviewed and revised HR policy and procedure ensuring all documents align with our Anti-discrimination policy.
10. Published a revised edition of our Acknowledgement of Country. The revised edition takes into account the land and the waters where we work and references Elders past, present and emerging as the holders of tradition and culture as well as nurturers of future generations. Artwork sourced from a young Gomeroi artist based in Tamworth.
11. Introduction of new uniform design featuring artwork sourced from a young Gomeroi artist based in Tamworth. All staff received a uniform from Management.
12. Register of Aboriginal service providers across our region from Tamworth in the south, to Moree in the west, Tenterfield in the north, and Armidale in the east. This document is for internal use.
13. Development of in-house program, Share The Journey, promoting social and emotional wellbeing and empowerment of Aboriginal women. The program is delivered in culturally safe spaces in partnership with Aboriginal organisations.
14. Increased awareness and support of important cultural events like National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week. All staff are encouraged to attend events during these weeks. Homes North sponsors ANTaR Armidale's Annual Reconciliation Bridge Walk. We also sponsor the Tamworth NAIDOC Debutante Ball each year. We host events in all our offices and throughout our communities inviting Elders to share their stories, deepening our learning and understanding of the unique and rich histories, cultures, contributions and achievements of First Nations people.
15. Our Statement of Recognition and Commitment acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Traditional Custodians and Owners of the land, the skies and waterways, recognising continual connection to Country. The statement acknowledges, respects and supports the unique culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the right to self-determination and self-sufficiency. It acknowledges past injustices and recognises the survival, resilience and successes of Traditional Custodians and Owners. The statement is a promise from Homes North to advocate for truth telling, and equality and equity, and to empower traditional Custodians and Owners as a social and affordable housing provider and as an employer. Our Statement of Recognition and Commitment is on page 10 and 11 of this document.

Our Challenges

Documenting our challenges as a Community Housing Provider ensures a realistic, transparent and honest approach to reconciliation that recognises the value of learning and growth.

1. Increasing complexity of social housing tenants. Many social housing tenants face a combination of issues including trauma, mental health problems, substance use disorder, domestic violence, and financial instability. These issues often overlap and exacerbate each other, making it difficult to address them in isolation. Managing tenancies for tenants with complex needs requires skilled service providers who can provide ongoing support, mediation, and crisis intervention when necessary.
2. As the general population ages, social housing tenants are increasingly older and may have specific health needs or mobility issues that require tailored housing solutions and support services.
3. Trauma and Homeslessness. Many tenants have experience trauma, including homelessness prior to accessing social housing. Addressing trauma requires specialised support services to stabilize tenants and help them maintain their tenancies.
4. Digital Divide. Access to digital technologies and online services is increasingly important or social housing tenants. Those who lack digital literacy or access to technology may face additional barriers in accessing support services and opportunities for social inclusion.
5. Policy and funding constraints. Limited funding and policy constraints can hinder the ability of housing providers to offer comprehensive support services and adapt to evolving needs of tenants.
6. Shortage of affordable housing, increasing demand and limited supply growth. There is a chronic shortage of affordable housing across Australia resulting in long waiting lists. Increasing demand for social housing and limited growth in new social housing units has compounded these issues.
7. Aging housing stock. Existing social housing stock is aging and in need of maintenance or renovation, reducing the number of livable units available to tenants and increasing maintenance costs for community housing providers nationally.

We have faced challenges throughout our RAP journey that have impacted our progress, we continue to strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for our organisation and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities we operate in.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan Committee Members

Working Group Members +

Cathy Duncan (*Kamilaroi*), Board Director

Chantelle Allan (*Kamilaroi*), Client Relations Officer

Hain MacKay-Cruise, Chief Operating Officer

Janelle Speed (*Biripi & Dhunghutti*), Board Director

Jodie McNamara, Regional Manager - Tenancy

Maree McKenzie, CEO and RAP Champion

Patricia Moran (*Dunghutti & Anaiwan*), Client Relations Officer

Penny McMillan (*Kamilaroi/Anaiwan*), Senior Client Relations Officer

Tonia Ryan (*Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi*), Client Relations Officer

Our Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group Members

Alpena Banfield (*Yuwaalaraay, Gomeroi, Thunggutti & Jarwoyn*), Client Relations Officer

Caitlyn Butler (*Wiradjuri*), Resident Engagement Coordinator

Cathy Noon, Residential Engagement Officer

Jennifer Littleboy, Senior Administration Officer

Joy Wilson, Residential Engagement Officer

Nickie Murcell, Manager Service Improvements and Partnerships

Rebecca Haney, Resident Engagement Coordinator

Relationships

Our core business is the provision of safe, secure and affordable homes and our tenants are at the very centre of our business. Forty-six percent of Homes North's households are Aboriginal, and we see the building of relationships with our communities as vital for developing greater understanding and insight, helping us meet the needs of our communities. We are committed to ensuring access to our services is fair, equitable, and free from barriers. No one will be disadvantaged in accessing homes.

Building strong relationships helps us to understand the uniqueness of individual communities, the needs for future growth, and the impact of Homes North's decisions on individuals, families, and communities. Building strong relationships underpins our strategic objectives of supporting and sustaining positive tenancies, achieving service and operational excellence, and letting our tenants guide us into the future.

Strong relationships are forged from the very beginning of an individual's journey with Homes North. Staff who have completed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency training (Aboriginal Cultural Competency Standard 2 Historical and Social Factors Inform Practice; Standard 3 Person and Family Centred Practice, and Standard 5 Service Delivery and Practice—Aboriginal Cultural Competency Standards: A Self-Assessment Process for Community Housing Providers published in June 2016 by the NSW Federation of Housing Associations and the NSW Department of Family and Community Services as part of the Community Housing for Aboriginal People Strategy), deliver bespoke workshops—Best Start, Ready Set Rent, Renting The Inside Story, and Share the Journey—that are designed to support long-term tenancies.

> "Building strong relationships with Aboriginal communities is paramount as is building greater awareness of Aboriginal cultures and understanding how culture and tradition enriches our local communities."

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1. Establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal stakeholders and organisations.	1.1 Review, update and continue to implement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Engagement Plan for 2026/27 prioritising collaboration with the Tenant Advisory Group.	February 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	1.2 Continue to build on successful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations through the Homes North Regional Waste Strategy. Develop similar practical strategies as tools for engagement.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	1.3 Increase the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resident engagement across all Homes North tenant groups.	September 2027	Resident Engagement Officers
	1.4 Build stronger relationships with key strategic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and, where needed, develop Memorandums of Understanding or Service Level Agreements that reflect our goals to build stronger relationships to deliver better outcomes for our tenants.	November 2025	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	1.5 Improve service delivery based on consultation with appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups in the community.	November 2025	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager + Resident Engagement Officers
	1.6 Strengthen our relationship with the Aboriginal Housing Office at CEO level and at a regional level to facilitate collaboration at an operational level.	June 2027	Chief Executive Officer
	1.7 Strengthen positive relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders through planned cultural and non-cultural events. For example, extending invitations to community Elders to open proceedings with a Welcome to Country.	September 2027	Resident Engagement Officers
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	2.1 Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and materials (sourced from Reconciliation Australia) to staff and Homes North's community.	April–May 2026 April–May 2027	SIP Senior Administration Officer
	2.2 Ensure RAP Working Group members participate in an external NRW event.	May–June 2026 May – June 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	2.3 Encourage and support staff and senior team leaders to participate in at least one external event, across our region, to recognise and celebrate NRW.	May–June 2026 May–June 2027	Chief Executive Officer

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
	2.4 Organise at least one NRW event each year.	May–June 2026 May–June 2027	Resident Engagement Officers
	2.5 Register all our NRW events on Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.	May–June 2026 May–June 2027	SIP Senior Administration Officer
3. Promote reconciliation throughout our sphere of influence.	3.1 Implement strategies to engage staff in reconciliation. Utilise internal and external digital platform.	December 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	3.2 Communicate our commitment to reconciliation publicly. Utilise internal and external traditional and digital media.	May–June 2026 May–June 2027	SIP Senior Administration Officer
	3.3 Explore opportunities to influence our external stakeholders to drive and advance reconciliation outcomes positively.	November 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	3.4 Each year, Homes North collaborates with other like-minded organisations to advance reconciliation. For example, Homes North works closely with local advocacy organisation, ANTAR Armidale, planning and delivering the annual National Reconciliation Week Bridge Walk.	April–May 2026 April–May 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	4.1 Review HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions and any future needss.	May 2026	People & Culture Manager
	4.2 Develop communication strategy for reviewed anti-discrimination policy.	October 2025	People & Culture Manager
	4.3 Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy.	November 2025	People & Culture Manager
	4.4 Educate executive and senior leaders on the effects of racism and ensure executive and senior leaders lead all staff in recognising and acknowledging the effects of racism.	September 2026	Chief Executive Officer
5. Deliver culturally aware and culturally safe services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples accessing Temporary Accommodation and community/social housing.	5.1 In consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors design bespoke workshops that are culturally aware and culturally safe to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples access temporary accommodation and community/social housing.	September 2027	Regional Housing Manager Resident Engagement Coordinators
	5.2 Deliver bespoke workshops across the New England North West by staff who have completed training according to the Cultural Competency Standards: A Self-Assessment Process for Community Housing Providers.	September 2027	Residential Engagement Officers Resident Engagement Coordinators

Respect

We understand the importance of building relationships with Aboriginal people and communities, and that we respect and acknowledge diversity across the region we service. We will continue to build awareness of Aboriginal cultures, appreciate and develop greater understanding and acceptance of Aboriginal histories, stories, losses and successes. We recognise the importance of truth-telling, acknowledge losses with humility and regret, and celebrate successes with shared pride.

The Community Housing industry has worked together to develop standards for working with Aboriginal people which are articulated in *Aboriginal Cultural Competency Standards: A Self-Assessment Process for Community Housing Providers* (https://www.aho.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/ABORIGINAL-CULTURAL-COMPETENCY-STANDARDS_0.pdf). The implementation of our Reconciliation Action Plan will reflect industry standards and will build on these standards.

Homes North proudly celebrates National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week each year. These events are essential in demonstrating our commitment to diversity and inclusion, strengthening relationships with our staff and communities, promoting social cohesion and cultural awareness, and upholding our values of ethical leadership and accountability.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
6. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and rights through cultural learning.	6.1 Continue to review and implement cultural learning and awareness training for staff.	November 2025	RAP Working Group
	6.2 Consult with local Elders regarding continued development and implementation of our cultural safety framework.	October 2025 – February 2026	RAP Committee
	6.3 Implement, and communicate the cultural learning strategy document for our staff.	June 2026	RAP Working Group
	6.4 Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group and Committee members and other key leadership staff to participate in formal and structured cultural learning.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
7. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal people by observing cultural protocols.	7.1 Continue to increase staff understanding of the purpose and significance underpinning cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols, as included in induction pack, at induction training and at meetings.	June 2026 & September 2027	RAP Working Group
	7.2 Continue to review, develop, implement and communicate our cultural safety framework, including protocols for Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country.	December 2026	People & Culture Manager
	7.3 Invite an Elder to open significant annual meetings like our yearly All Staff Meeting and Annual General Meeting with a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol.	May–June 2026 December 2025 & 2026	RAP Working Group
	7.4 Open Homes North meetings with an Acknowledgement of Country as appropriate.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
8. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	8.1 RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.	July (annually)	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	8.2 Review HR policies and procedures and remove barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week events.	July 2026	People & Culture Manager
	8.3 Promote, encourage and support participation in external NAIDOC Week events to all staff.	June 2026 June 2027	Chief Executive Officer
9. Maintain momentum through the calendar year, celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural milestones and events across our platforms.	9.1 Hold in-person events to support key cultural milestones that acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and celebrate past and present achievements with a shared vision for the future.	September 2027	SIP Senior Administration Officer
	9.2 Share content on our social media channels to show our support of culturally significant events.	September 2027	SIP Senior Administration Officer

Opportunities

Continued improvement of our Aboriginal staff-to-tenant ratio is central to providing a culturally appropriate service that is embedded across our organisation. This commitment is supported through culturally informed policy development and the ongoing implementation of our Aboriginal Employment and Support Strategy, first introduced in our 2017–18 Reconciliation Action Plan.

Improving representation not only enhances our cultural capability but also helps to break down access barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families, supporting efforts to address intergenerational disadvantage.

Employment pathways are available across all areas of our operations — from tenancy and access management to community development, property maintenance, and the construction of new housing. While many of these roles require specific skill sets, Homes North actively supports traineeships and cadetships in partnership with the Aboriginal Employment Strategy and CHIA NSW. These partnerships ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees and cadets receive targeted skills training, cultural support, and professional mentoring to help build meaningful, long-term careers within the community housing sector.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
10. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal recruitment, retention, and professional development.	10.1 Continue to develop our cadetship program with CHIA NSW to support opportunities for Aboriginal candidates.	June 2026 & December 2026	People & Culture Manager
	10.2 Continue to develop our Aboriginal trainee program with Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) to support opportunities for Aboriginal candidates.	July 2026 & 2027	People & Culture Manager
	10.3 Resource, develop and support our Aboriginal staff through initiatives: mentoring from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors working in the sector, attending Aboriginal Network Meetings hosted by CHIA NSW, and mandatory cultural awareness and culturally safe service delivery training.	August 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	10.4 Build knowledge of current Aboriginal staffing to inform recruitment and retention, and a professional development strategy.	July 2026	People & Culture Manager
	10.5 Develop and implement our Aboriginal professional development strategy.	July 2026	People & Culture Manager
	10.6 Advertise employment opportunities on platforms that reach Aboriginal stakeholders.	September 2027	People & Culture Manager

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
	10.7 Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in our workplace.	September 2027	People & Culture Manager
11. Increase Aboriginal supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	11.1 Review Procurement Policy. Set realistic goals for procurement of goods and services.	August 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	11.2 Review Supply Nation membership.	December 2026	SIP Senior Administration Officer
	11.3 Continue to communicate opportunities for procurement of goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to staff.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	11.4 Review and update procurement policy to remove barriers to procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Isander businesses.	September 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	11.5 Develop commercial relationship with at least two new Aboriginal businesses.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager

From left: Client Relations Officer, Trish Moran and Innovation & Technology Officer, Tim Harris.

Governance

We have structures and processes in place to oversee the development, implementation, and monitoring of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). Key aspects of our RAP governance include:

1. Commitment from Leadership. RAP Governance starts with the commitment of senior leadership to reconciliation efforts. Homes North's CEO is our RAP champion, advocating for reconciliation within the organisation.

2. Reconciliation Action Plan Committee & Working Group. Homes North established it's RAP Committee and Working Group in 2016. Our RAP Committee provides leadership to the Working Group, who are responsible for delivering on our RAP actions. Our RAP Working Group includes representatives from various parts of our organisation, including Aboriginal employees.

3. Monitoring and Reporting. We hold RAP Working Group meetings fortnightly. Working Group members have specific roles, actions are minuted and reportable.

4. Integration with strategic and annual plans. Our RAP Plan is integrated into the organisation's overarching strategy and business operations and is reflected in our strategic and annual plans. Integration and alignment ensures reconciliation principles are embedded within our core values and practices.

5. Continuous improvement. Homes North is committed to continuous improvement. We review our RAP regularly, seek feedback and make adjustments to achieve better outcomes.

We see RAP Governance as essential for guaranteeing that reconciliation efforts are meaningful, sustainable, and aligned with the values and goals of the Homes North, providing a framework for accountability, transparency, and ongoing commitment to reconciliation.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
12. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Committee and Working Group structure to drive governance of the RAP.	12.1 Maintain our RAP Committee structure of representatives from all working units within Homes North, including the CEO, executive and senior management teams, and board representatives. Ensure all Aboriginal staff are invited to participate and that the RAP Committee meets bi-annually for face-to-face workshops.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	12.2 Maintain our RAP Working Group comprising Aboriginal staff, resourced with two administrators to meet fortnightly to carry out our RAP actions and report to bi-annual RAP Committee workshops.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	12.3 Maintain, review and apply our Terms of Reference for our RAP structure.	December 2025	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager

Homes North CEO, Maree McKenzie, is our Reconciliation Action Plan Champion. Maree advocates for reconciliation within Homes North and is the face of our cultural events.

Maree is photographed below at our National Reconciliation Week 2024 event with, from left: Maree McKenzie, Homes North Board Director Peter Johnston, Aunty Kerry Moran, Homes North Board Director Sue Ainsworth, and Aunty Hazel Vale.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
	12.4 RAP Committee to ensure regular communications with Board of Directors & First Nations committees. RAP Committee will convene quarterly (a minimum of 3 times a year) with a post committee meeting report presented to the Board.	November 2025 February 2026 May 2026 August 2026 November 2026 February 2027 May 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
13. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	13.1 Allocate budget for RAP implementation.	November 2025	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	13.2 Engage senior leaders and other staff in the delivery of RAP commitments.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	13.3 Improve tracking, measuring and reporting on RAP commitments.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	13.4 Maintain CEO as RAP Executive champion and seek nominations for two RAP Lead champions.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
14. Building accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges, and learnings both internally and externally.	14.1 Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence.	July 2026 July 2027 (Or when there is a change in key staff)	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	14.2 Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access to the only RAP Impact Survey.	August 2026 July 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	14.3 Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Survey to Reconciliation Australia.	September 2026 September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	14.4 Report RAP progress to all staff at all staff quarterly via internal communication channels.	December 2025 December 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	14.5 Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges, and learnings via traditional and digital media.	December 2025 December 2026	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	14.6 Investigate participating in Reconciliation Australia's biennial Workplace RAP Barometer.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
	14.7 Submit a traffic light report to Reconciliation Australia at the conclusion of this RAP.	September 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
15. Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	15.1 Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	January 2027	Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager

homesnorth

homes | lives | communities

Contact:
Nickie Murcell
Service Improvement & Partnerships Manager
Homes North Community Housing
nickiem@homesnorth.org.au
02 6772 5133