

Inaugural Fellow Paul Briggs Luncheon 2009



On Wednesday 29 May 2009 over a hundred people from business, philanthropic and government sectors, as well as the wider Victorian Indigenous community, came together to celebrate the work and vision of Paul and acknowledge how the support of the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership contributed to his achievements over the previous five years.

MC Peter Maher kept the room entertained, the program on track and set the tone for the day as both a celebration of Paul's work, while also acknowledging that there is still a lot of work to be done.

After listening to the delightful Liz Cavanagh guests were welcomed to Boonerwung country by Elder Carolyn Briggs.

Guests had plenty of opportunity to talk with one another over lunch before hearing two moving speeches.

Young Wemba Wemba woman Carly Sheldon gave a passionate and heartfelt account of what it means to be a young Indigenous Victorian. Her words left the room not only thinking about Indigenous identity, but their also own identity.

She spoke of the importance of acknowledging people and place, the tradition and culture of Indigenous people within Australia.

She talked about how the support of Paul Briggs and her family has helped her to find her identity and to be openly proud of who she is, as a young woman, as a young Indigenous woman. Where we come from is an important part of our identity and if you haven't been allowed to acknowledge and celebrate this positively, how can you know who you are?

"No one has ever said to me "You're only a little bit Australian" or asked what percentage or part of me is Australian, but they do when I say I'm Aboriginal..."

For a while I gave up. I couldn't be bothered dealing with the discrimination. It would make me so angry when someone would question who I was because I didn't fit their notion of who I should be...."

"I actually told someone I was Italian once. It was easier than saying I was Aboriginal. I knew they wouldn't question me or call me a liar."



Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership

Carly very clearly summed up what Paul is about and why we were all there together to recognise and show our appreciation for Paul and his work:

“...his drive for positive change in the community, mutual understanding, strong families and strong personal and cultural identity for Aboriginal people and all Australians.”

“When you walk into Rumbalara Football Netball Club or the Koori Resource Centre in Shepparton you feel it. You feel a strong sense of identity and belonging.”

We don't think there are many that have had the privilege of visiting these organisations or participating in their work would disagree.

Paul spoke of the need for strong leadership in Indigenous communities and the broader Australian community and the importance of support of those leaders by organisations like the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership.

Having a strong identity, cultural awareness of non Indigenous people and the need for change are strong and consistent themes in Paul's work.

The necessary move from the current state for Aboriginal people – life on the fringe - to one where Aboriginal people can equally contribute economically, socially and spiritually in mainstream Australia is a driving force behind Paul's vision for an Australia where Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike feel culturally safe and welcome in their own country.

“A treaty now will go a long way to a more equal Australia”, Paul Briggs, The Age, Monday 4 May 2009 p11.

<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/a-treaty-now-will-go-a-long-way-to-a-more-equal-australia-20090503-are8.html>