



NATIONAL INDIGENOUS CORPORATION 8596

RIPA Background

Remote Indigenous Parents Australia – National Indigenous Corporation ICN 8596 trading as RIPA National

RIPA is an independent entity registered with ORIC ICN 8596 on 5 April 2017 as Remote Indigenous Parents Association National Indigenous Corporation and updated on 18 September 2018 as Remote Indigenous Parents Australia National Indigenous Corporation.

The inspiration for RIPA came as a result of the eleven years Bjorn Christie-Johnston spent as a senior houseparent at a College in Darwin with an intake of some 300 Indigenous students from some forty remote Communities across the top end of Australia. Of particular concern to Bjorn was the apparent lack of a genuine Indigenous parent and family voice into matters concerning the wellbeing and education of their children.

From the year 2000 Bjorn collaborated closely with Terry O’Connell OAM (Director of Real Justice Australia) to ascertain the validity and implications of this concern. Bjorn, with the support of Terry, created a range of contextualised ‘restorative tools’ to support Bjorn’s brand of restorative practice know as RPE (Restorative Principles of Engagement).

From 2005-2016, Bjorn was a Director and Vice Chairman (6yrs) of Boarding Australia (BA), previously known as National Association for Rural Student Accommodation (NARSA). This included his time as CEO of BA from December 2010 - January 2015 on a voluntary basis. Terry O’Connell OAM was appointed to the BA Board in 2013. BA became the catalyst for two successive PaCE and a IAS projects funded by the Australian Government from 2011-2017 administered by Boarding Australia. The purpose of the funding was to establish RIPA as a national independent Indigenous organisation to enable Indigenous parents and families in remote communities to have a voice on matters concerning the wellbeing and education of their children. The major pilot work was carried out in the Roper Gulf region of the Northern Territory and the Tiwi Islands to the north of Darwin. Findings and recommendations are included in reports compiled by Bjorn at the end of 2017.

In 2016, Bjorn and Terry resigned as Directors of BA and became Directors of RIPA National. RIPA National is in the early stages of refining the Constitution and developing systems and structures for Indigenous parents from remote Indigenous Communities to share their experiences, expectations, hopes and aspirations regarding the education and wellbeing of their children. The goal is for RIPA National to be an independent national ‘voice’ for Indigenous parents through a process of networking, events and activities, workshops, forums, conferences, committees, delegations.

Indigenous parents from remote and isolated communities face a wide range of unique issues and challenges including significant social, physical, spiritual and cultural disruptions when seeking to engage with mainstream systems, structures and processes. It is often difficult for parents and families to communicate with the mainstream agencies and institutions due to limited understanding and awareness of procedures and processes, as



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well as inadequate and culturally appropriate communication services and technology. RIPA National is a 'grassroots' organisation for Indigenous parents and families to discuss and address their unique needs and issues.

The RIPA National Constitution cites Restorative Principles of Engagement (RPE) otherwise known as Restorative Practice, as a recommended approach for Communities, agencies and service providers to achieve a shared understanding and common language on matters concerning student and family support. RPE has the potential to become the greatest influence in shaping a culture of healthy, respectful relationships that foster positive learning opportunities for students, parents, service providers and support agencies. The reports from the pilot projects in Roper Gulf and Tiwi Islands demonstrate the need to develop a RPE guiding document for others to replicate the experience. Additionally, the reports provide insight for further development, such as RPE ambassador training; the application of national boarding standards community engagement; appropriate student and staff induction and mentoring; contextualised RPE learning and training materials and resources for educators, boarding providers and support agencies; relevant and targeted research, as well as the development of Both Ways Education (BWE).

Capacity building and self-determination within remote Indigenous Communities are seen as fundamental to supporting student and family wellbeing, education and employment.

The vast collective knowledge and experience of the RIPA National Board and Advisory Panel members as well as the RIPA community contacts, offers a unique contribution to the shaping of a new paradigm that promotes a contextualised model of 'grassroots' engagement and respectfully challenges current institutional 'disconnect'.

Current RIPA Board members:

Mrs Lorraine Bennett (Co-Chair)

Mr John Morgan (Co-Chair)

Ms Michelle Bennett

Mrs Nicole Thompson

Mr Terry O'Connell OAM

Mr Neil Gibson

Mr Bjorn Christie-Johnston (Contact Person)

As at August 2019