

**Developing an Aboriginal
identity when you have
little kinship/community
ties.**

- I acknowledge the First Peoples, the traditional custodians of the countries of the Kulin people in Melbourne, Elders past and present and all First Nations people in the audience today.

What makes an Aboriginal identity?

- A knowledge of **where you come from** (family history, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history)
- who you are (**personal identity**)
- who you **belong** to (family, extended family and community)
- **where** you belong (land and water)
- what you **do** (participation, cultural expression) and what you believe (cultural values, beliefs and practices)([SNAICC, 2012](#)).

Pick the “real” Kookaburra



Participants

- Participants identified themselves as light skinned with little or no family or community networks.
- Many were children and grandchildren of Stolen Generations and had little to no records or information. Some were themselves Stolen Generation.
- Some were adopted either into kinship networks or non-Aboriginal families
- Some were fostered as above
- Some knew they were Aboriginal from childhood, some did not.
- Total number was 16, 1 dropped out leaving 15.
- Decided this was a “secretive” subject- one not really spoken about so hard to get participants

How?

- How did these participants go about forging an Aboriginal identity given they:
- Were often not raised in the Aboriginal community
- Had little input culturally
- Had little knowledge about how to enter the community or where to find knowledge

Self learning

- Learn about the Aboriginal history and culture through University, TAFE, books, DVDs.
Go to Country and listen, observe, explore.
- Talk to other Aboriginal people through school, land councils, elders, and mentors.
- Trace your family genealogy.
- Attend all cultural events.
- Attend cultural museums/centres.

- “You don’t get it without accountability for yourself. If you are expecting anyone to hold your hand and listen to your weeping story and put a doona over you and give you a cup of hot cocoa it is not going to happen...if you don’t educate yourself in the process or you sit back going gimme gimme there is no way in hell that that is going to work” (Bulabalaa).

Family

- From self-learning you may have found biological family
- Create your own family that will accept you-likeminded people
- Going to places like AITSIIS and finding things out
- Visiting their own communities, old people and land councils for information

- “So we had already started tracing the family tree. We found out they were part of the Stolen Generation. They were taken from their mum when they were little and they had photos of their mum who has dark skin and they never knew why. So from that as a family we started to find family and chase who we were and started to identify” (Kalla).

Community

- Attend cultural days and events such as NAIDOC.
- Employment in the community: either paid or voluntary.
- Involvement in community organisations such as land councils.
- Attend cultural/community events such as camps and workshops.
- Participate in Aboriginal teams/sports any other group activity.

“That’s funny because when you tell other people you are Aboriginal first of all they don’t believe it, they think you are not. That is how people say you are light-skinned Aboriginal and you just take that on as part of your identity. But if I had to say how I feel, I’m me. I’m Aboriginal, I’m Maori, I’m German. I am a whole bunch of things that makes me who I am. It’s how I identify. Why should there be a difference?”
(Kalina).

Spirituality

- Learning traditional practices (eg: basket weaving) and language.
- Finding out and then applying relevant values, ethics and worldview of Aboriginal people.
- Land connection and developing your own connection to place.

“I don't know if I ever stopped and thought that it was important but it is just who I am. Because I have no other way of seeing the world or being. To me it would be like the same as someone telling me that I did not have to identify as the gender I am. It's just who I am and I don't know any other way of being” (Gurugan).

Self-acceptance

A true acceptance of who you are and what you look like.

Self-Learning

Learn about the Aboriginal history and culture through University, TAFE, books, DVDs. Go to Country and listen, observe, explore. Talk to other Aboriginal people through school, land councils, elders, and mentors. Trace your family genealogy. Attend all cultural events. Attend cultural museums/centres.

Developing an Aboriginal Identity

Spirituality

Traditional practices and language.
Values, ethics and worldview of Aboriginal people.
Land connection and developing your own song line.

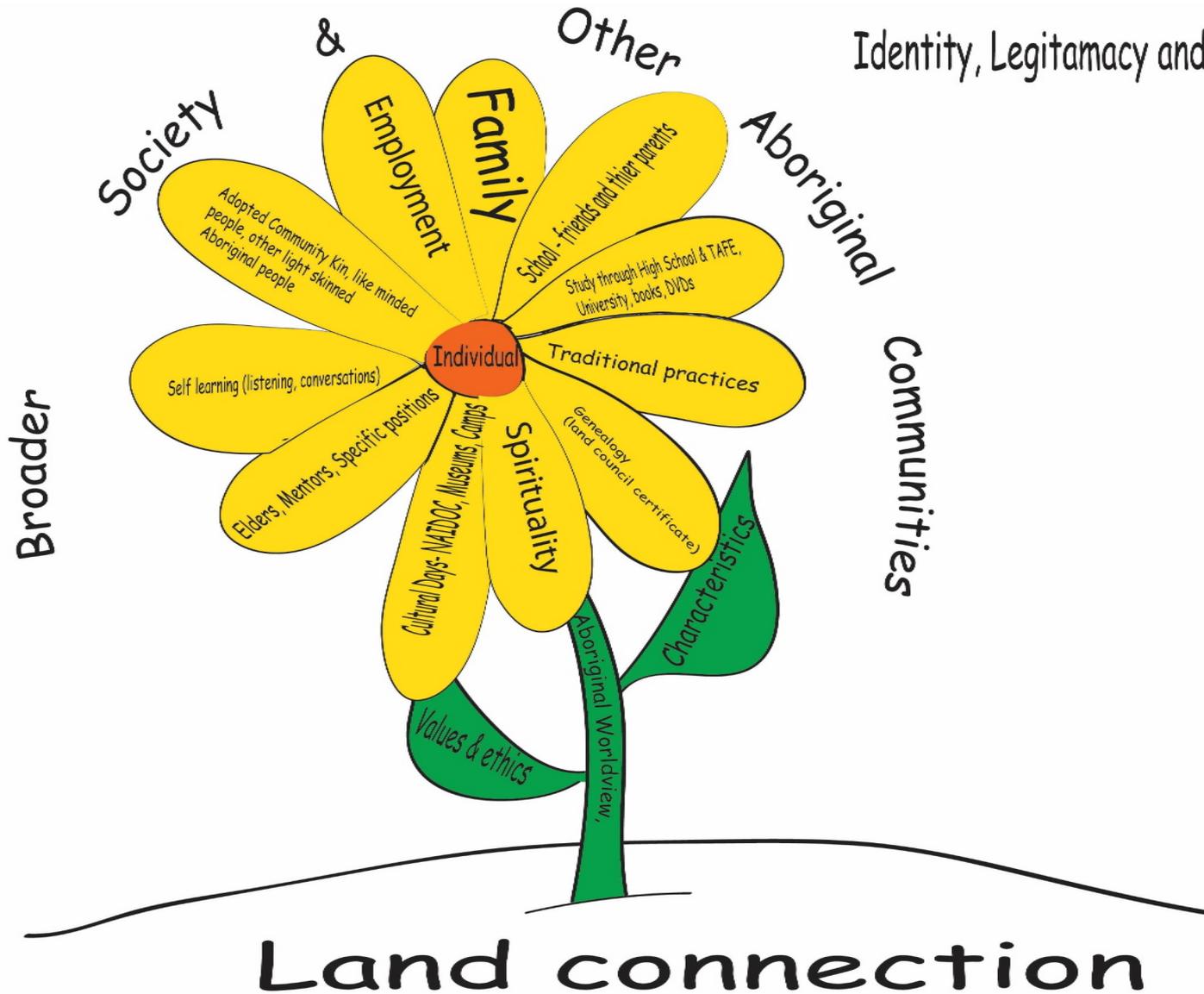
Family

From self-learning you may have found biological family. Create your own family that will accept you - likeminded people.

Community

Attend cultural/community events such as camps, workshops and NAIDOC Week.
Employment in the community: either paid or voluntary.
Involvement in community organisations such as land councils.
Participate in Aboriginal teams/sports any other group activity.

Identity, Legitimacy and Acceptance



Why be inclusive with Aboriginal identity?

- It has been shown that the persistence of cultural identity among Indigenous communities is dependent on how successful one generation is at passing on its beliefs and practices ([Meyer, 1996](#)).
- Geertz ([2004](#)) has argued that one of the most significant factors in determining how successful an Indigenous group will be in maintaining and sustaining their cultural identity is through a **sense of community**. This means a collection of individuals who **share activities and cultural knowledge**, as well as an **effective networking system**.

- “It is going from feeling like one of the smallest people in the world and being continuously looked over to being looked at, people just seemed to look straight through me before, now to me standing up and putting my head back and saying this is me and I deserve your attention and I deserve your acknowledgment rather than just being pushed around” (Thoomie)

Messages for Social Work

- As that change agent, social workers should be seeking to produce **new views** about what an Aboriginal person is and how to redefine family, community and culture.
- There is a need for **increased education** around the history of colonisation in Australia and in particular how it relates to Aboriginal people both from the historical context and now in the present day.
- Social workers need to be involved in **raising awareness, reducing racism and having a deeper understanding of inclusivity**.
- Social workers need an understanding of the issues for all Aboriginal people including the **diversity of identity** so that when a client/s comes into a social work practice or environment, social workers have an understanding, empathy and some idea of the complexities what the person may need in therapy.
- The meaning of **Whiteness and racial diversity**, the impact of **current lateral violence** in the community and on light skinned Aboriginal people in particular needs to be addressed within the Social Work degree so that social workers can be that change agent.

When my blonde haired, fair-skinned Wiradyuri/Gamilaroi son comes to me and asks ‘who am I?’ I want to be able to say to him ‘You are here to be the best *you* that you can be’. I think that is the answer for us all. The best you can be includes being Aboriginal just the way you are. Aboriginality is so much more than what someone looks like or the colour of their skin. **As an Aboriginal person, your essence is already perfectly Aboriginal.**