

CIPW launch

That was Josh Gilbert, the Assistant Director of the Jumbunna Institute/UTS Business School Centre for Indigenous People and Work.

Good morning and thank you so much for being here on this big and exciting day for Josh and I.

I'd like to acknowledge Deputy President of the Fair Work Commission, Terri Butler and of course our Tidda Katie Kiss, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, who'll we'll hear from shortly.

I'd also like to acknowledge my friend, colleague and dear Brother Professor Lindon Coombes, and Professor Carl Rhodes, Dean of the Business School. Their support for this incredible joint venture has been enthusiastic, steadfast and amazing, and Robynne Quiggin, Pro Vice Chancellor Indigenous Leadership and engagement here at UTS who supports us in everything we do. I'd also like to acknowledge the complete legend that is Kathy Walsh, who can't be here today, who is the Associate Dean Research here at the Business School who has really made this happen.

While she can't be here, I'd like to acknowledge the work and extraordinary leadership of the extraordinary Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt, whose vision and leadership makes everything possible for mob and our work at UTS and beyond.

Despite recent attempts at division around our ancient practice, I am so proud today to acknowledge country in a renewed spirit of embrace, pride and unity. In our family, we have two cultural fundamentals that guide us. One is that we are descendants of Sydney Aboriginal people, the Fowler family, who made their home around Newton after dislocation and removal. We acknowledge the Sydney coast Aboriginal people whose unbroken community, cultural and custodianship of this land has been unbroken for 65 000 years and we acknowledge Elders, past and present and ancestors who walk with us always. I acknowledge Aboriginal people here today, and there is many, and people of Aboriginal bloodline including my brother and children.

On our settler side, we are the custodians of traditions that may be the best that came with them that go directly to notions of fairness and dignity at work. Both of our great grandfathers, Knut Ljunggren from Kalmar in Sweden and Peter McLaren from Glasgow were coal lumpers down here on the Sydney waterfront who took part in the 1917 General Strike, bringing their trade unionism with them when they came here. If you don't know, that strike gave us many of the working conditions we take for granted today as an Australian society and their principles are deeply embedded in who we are.

Old Knut was in fact a seafarer, a sailmaker whose sailmakers medal our family holds and he jumped ship and stayed, giving us cause with great pride to proclaim in the last

twenty years or so, we're illegal. That belief in the right to work and to do so with dignity, purpose and fairness has never left us.

The road to the launch of this Centre has been a long one. In our family, we have always known that Aboriginal people have always gone to extraordinary lengths to participate in the paid economy. We know from Rowena Welsh Jarrett's research that the first traders in this city were Aboriginal women who, again just down here, traded fish and seafood with the colonists in the very early days of the colony.

As the magnificent work by Murawari and Yuwaalaray woman Kirsten Gray, "Labour, Love and Law" that is our banner tells us, in the taking of the land and in the development of the modern Australian workforce and thus economy, mob have made enormous contributions, sometimes paid in rations (on their own land), sometimes in indentured conditions, had their wages stolen and not had autonomy over the manner in which the money they actually earned was spent, sometimes been paid substandard wages on the basis of race alone, been dislocated and removed from kin and country to work, sometimes been actively, deliberately excluded and still, our people worked. Always.

Significantly, our banner pays homage to those people who were unpaid and endured unspeakable conditions, often removed from their families as children to be 'trained', that were undervalued but nonetheless indispensable to the colonial project.

So what is this rubbish called 'Indigenous employment'? Why does the myth of the self-choosing 'unemployed, unemployable, only fit for low skill low pay jobs, dole bludging Aborigine' persist?

It persists because it so neatly reinforces the populist political narrative. It exists because the 'Indigenous employment' narrative has had no capacity to be owned by Indigenous people. It is owned by those who would seek to divide this place.

It goes to racism, underemployment and exclusion from leadership positions.

It still shocks me and beggars belief that in very recent times, Aboriginal people in this country have worked but not been paid wages or superannuation on the whim of a millionaire philanthropist and that the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs, said in a statement in 2016 as it pertained to this scheme that "those who can work, should work which is why mutual obligation requirements are a key component of employment services". Those requirements were not mutual obligations requirements.

It still shocks me that until the forerunner of this Centre, the Jumbunna Indigenous People and Work Hub, conducted the first Gari Yala, or Speak the Truth survey five years ago, Indigenous people had never been asked about workplace experiences. Never. It still shocks me that there is no data, none, on what the experiences of Indigenous job seekers might be. It still shocks me that we are unable to identify what the wage and

salary differential is between a non-Indigenous male and an Indigenous one, let alone females and what the other pay disparities might be. For example.

So what Josh and I and others have been doing for the last five years is challenging the narrative and what the launch of this Indigenous-owned, self-determined Centre represents is the reclaiming of the narrative. By, for and of us.

We aim to do that through rigorous, industry-based Indigenous-led research, consulting and partnerships with other stakeholders in the employment community, focusing on policy formulation, law reform and workplace-based solutions. We are Indigenous people who have long experience in employment practice. We are researchers. We employ Indigenous research methodology.

Our Centre will embody our cultural principles of listening deeply and respectfully to our fellow First Nations people. Our goal is to create a recognisable, self-determined Centre that reclaims and redevelops the narrative and speaks from the real, lived experiences of First Nations workers.

Our Advisory Panel for the Centre, chaired by the wonderful Tanya Hosch, is delightfully old school but representative of a renewed sense of cooperation and optimism in terms of how we do business in this place, and brings together corporates, unions, lawyers and practitioners. Thanks to those of you who have agreed to sit on it and to those who are here today.

There's a few acknowledgements and thank yous. My employment sector mentor Dick Shearman is here, who took a punt on me when I was 24 years old and has given me unstinting support ever since. My employment sector practical impact research role models, Professor Rae Cooper and Professor Elizabeth Hill are here and show the way in terms of influence, and especially my sister, the best diversity employment researcher in the country Dr Jane O'Leary from the County Tipperary whose work in creating the Australian diversity employment industry research sector is unparalleled. Our lawyer Darren Fittler isn't here but deserves a shoutout. The three people who are known as the Brothers or the Uncles in our family – Gavin Brown, Lindon Coombes (again) and Jason Glanville give me endless entertainment and constant grounding in what it means to honour our community obligations. All the Tiddas who are here – too many to mention but you know who you are - thank you. And of course, my partner Paul Murphy and our family members, we build our family on our values of love and it works pretty well.

Notably, our Sissy Angela Daley who has the unfortunate job description of organising my life and in addition has organised this event within an inch of its life, I adore you and appreciate you very much.

And of course, Josh Gilbert. In the over a decade we've worked together I've watched you grow, develop and shine. Josh is my self-identifying third child, claims to speak fluent Naz and I'm so very excited that we're now working together on this mob-owned, mob-lead, game changing Centre for Indigenous People and Work.