**Diversity Council of Australia**

*Anna McPhee Memorial Diversity & Inclusion Oration*

*Soccer, Stigma, Suicide*

*- Let’s rush to come together -*

**Julia Gillard**

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**Melbourne**

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, and, in a spirit of reconciliation, pay my respect to their Elders – past and present.

I would like to thank the Diversity Council of Australia for the invitation to deliver the 2018 *Anna McPhee Memorial Diversity & Inclusion Oration*.

It is always humbling to give an oration in memory of a great Australian.

It is too often also poignant, because that person passed away too soon.

As it is with Anna McPhee.

We were from different sides of politics, and I did not know Anna.

And so, in preparing for this speech I tried to get a sense of the person from those who knew and loved her by reading some of the many heartfelt tributes to her.

Senator Dean Smith, Liberal Senator for WA, gave an Adjournment speech in the Senate last November.

He recalled a twenty-year friendship that began at a dinner of young Liberals in Canberra following the election of the Howard Government.

It was cemented not just by politics, but – I was delighted to read – by their mutual love of Neil Diamond.

I have been teased by friends for years for confessing a liking for Neil Diamond. Now I know I am not alone and I just need to get myself invited to a Liberal staffers’ party.

Senator Smith recounted that Anna McPhee was a woman of many firsts:

the first female chief of staff to a New South Wales Liberal Premier, Barry O'Farrell;

the first female deputy campaign director in any Liberal Party division across Australia;

and, as Senator Smith attests, “the key driver of the New South Wales Liberals 1996 marginal seats strategy… delivering the federal parliament one of the largest ever numbers of Coalition female parliamentarians.”

He concluded:

“Australia's Liberal women have lost their strongest advocate before she even really got started.”

While I am sure that Anna and I would not have seen eye to eye on a vast number of federal political issues, these achievements and her clear passion for women’s equality, means I am filled with pride to be giving a lecture in her name.

I was recently at a Time’s Up meeting in the US and had the pleasure of listening to Abby Wambach, two-time gold medal winner and the highest scoring soccer player – male or female – of all time. Abby in a much-noted speech said the following:

*During every 90-minute soccer match there are a few magical moments when the ball actually hits the back of the net and a goal is scored. . .*

*What happens next on the field is what transforms a bunch of individual women into a team.*

*Teammates from all over the field rush towards the goal scorer. It appears that we’re celebrating her, but what we’re really celebrating is every player, every coach, every practice, every sprint, every doubt and every failure that this one single goal represents.*

*You will not always be the goal scorer. And when you are not, you better be rushing toward her.*

*Women must champion each other. This can be difficult for us. Women have been pitted against each other since the beginning of time. For that one seat at the table.*

*Scarcity has been planted inside of us and among us. This scarcity is not our fault. But it is our problem. . . Call out each other’s wins and, just like we do on the field, claim the success of one woman as a collective success for all women.*

*Her victory is your victory. Celebrate it.*

Today, in this spirit, I rush towards Anna McPhee.

And as we celebrate her, I acknowledge Anna’s family – her husband, Reggie, mum Trish, sister Donna, niece Lindsay and cousin Marghite

(Mar-geet) – who are among us today.

**Diversity through *beyondblue’s* lens**

Diversity.

It really has become a catchword of our age, hasn’t it?

… as **now** as quinoa and man buns in Brunswick Street.

It also happens to be something Australians keep getting better and better at.

We have, after all, been practising diversity for a very long time.

As Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says, Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world.

I agree.

A society in which we strive to live up to Martin Luther King’s clarion call that we should be judged, not by the colour of our skin, but by the content of our characters.

My late father, John, would often quote those words.

Both he and my mother served as police officers. I grew up steeped in their firm minded views of law and order. Believing crime must be punished and justice must be served. I still believe that.

I also grew up loving the book *To Kill A Mockingbird* and, knowing if you look to race first, and wrong doing second, you make some dreadful mistakes.

At *beyondblue* we have an anti-racism campaign called ‘The Invisible Discriminator’ because we know being stigmatised solely on the basis of who you are is associated with psychological distress.

Its tag line is: Stop. Think. Respect.

Words worthy of reflection in Victoria today and throughout our fast-changing and diverse nation.

In fact, as the 2016 national Census tells us more people are claiming their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and the proportion of Australians born overseas is at a 120-year high.

Our national embrace of diversity doesn’t end there.

It includes Australians of different ages, gender identities, sexualities, religious beliefs, political ideologies and all kinds of different family structures.

Walking into many Australian workplaces, none of this requires explanation. The smiling faces who greet you and the lively conversation that ensues, will tell the story.

But at *beyondblue* we see diversity and inclusion through a different lens.

We see it from the perspective of the broad range of people experiencing mental health issues:

The o**ne in five working** Australians affected at any given time by mental health challenges.

**The one-in-two** of us who will experience poor mental health at some point in our lifetime.

**The one million** Australian adults living today with depression.

**The two million** with an anxiety condition.

**The more than 200** who, every day, feel so desperate they attempt to end their own lives.

**The eight a day who die by suicide**. A terrible figure that is more than twice the national road toll.

While some are locked out of meaningful employment, the vast majority of these people work.

They value work.

They are highly productive.

Yes, they may need flexibility, reasonable adjustments, time off from time to time.

But who doesn’t?

And too often, all employers see is a diagnosis, not the value of the richness of experience these people bring.

Too often employers view mental health in the workplace through the lens of deficit and risk.

Today, I want to talk to you about how we change that lens and see the upside of diversity and inclusion.

How we can rush towards each other.

But first, let me talk to you about today’s *beyondblue.*

***beyondblue* Today**

Now I know I am at risk at this point of you all starting to surreptitiously play with your phones, because you know all about *beyondblue*, right?

You know it’s an awareness raising body focused on depression, right?

Sorry wrong! If that’s the answer in your head, do not start answering emails.

It’s time to give you an update.

At *beyondblue,* we are still working on our historic mission of bringing depression out of the shadows and into everyday conversations.

But we have now broadened our mission to include anxiety and suicide prevention.

And while we still raise awareness and stare down stigma, we are also in the business of service innovation and behaviour change.

I think our service innovation work is the least understood, so let me start there.

At *beyondblue,* we identify a gap in services and then attract funding from non-government sources to research, co-design, incubate and pilot new approaches.

Once we have the evidence they work, we advocate to have them scaled up, commissioned by governments and embedded into the system.

And then we plan to exit.

So that we can move on to the next area of profound need.

For instance, we have designed what we call The Way Back Support Service, which provides psychosocial support to people for up to three months following their suicide attempt.

Let me give you some facts:

* There has been no significant reduction in Australia’s suicide rate in over a decade.
* No group is at greater risk of dying by suicide than those who have attempted suicide.
* Up to a quarter of those who attempt suicide will try again and their risk is highest in the first three months following an attempt.
* Yet half of people discharged from hospital after a suicide attempt do not attend follow-up treatment and 38 per cent of those who attend follow-up treatment terminate it within three months.

Put simply, there is no guaranteed, systematic follow up support offered to keep these people connected and motivated to live.

The Way Back Support Service changes this.

It links people to treatment and helps each person to make and keep to a safety plan.

It also helps the person identify and resolve the factors that contributed to their suicide attempt, like employment and relationship challenges, isolation and loneliness.

What started as a small trial in Darwin is now a service saving lives in six sites around the country, with three more coming on line.

The Way Back model is built on compelling evidence and has three years of operational experience.

It is ready to scale.

Now.

And so, we were delighted when the Federal Government put money in this year’s Budget to expand The Way Back to up to 25 more sites around the country over the next four years.

But the Commonwealth cannot do this alone.

Reducing Australia’s suicide rate requires a commitment from every one of us: from the community, health services and governments at every level.

And that’s why I will be appealing to all governments to contribute to funding The Way Back Support Service.

Let me also give you an example of how today’s *beyondblue* has moved from awareness raising to behaviour change.

In 2016, we commissioned research from experts at the University of Melbourne.

That research showed that everyday Australians commonly believe that asking someone directly whether they were contemplating suicide raised the risk they would attempt to take their lives. That it would put the idea in someone’s head.

But this commonly held view isn’t supported by evidence and in fact open, non-judgmental, caring conversations are protective - not dangerous or destructive.

We shared that research with the mental health and suicide prevention sectors and it has led to a collaborative effort bannered #YouCanTalk, involving *beyondblue*, the Black Dog Institute, Everymind, headspace, Lifeline, ReachOut and R U OK?

The main message is you don’t need to be a psychologist, a GP, or a nurse to check-in with someone you are worried about.

Trust your instincts and access YouCanTalk’s suicide prevention resources to assist you in having the discussion and to guide you on what to do and where to go if the answer is:

‘Yes, I am thinking about suicide.’

#YouCanTalk is essentially about changing the behaviour of individuals: family, friends, workmates.

But I think #YouCanTalk also demonstrates how the mental health sector itself can change our behaviour.

I hope in mental health and suicide prevention, as hard as it can be sometimes, we really try to rush towards each other…

celebrating each other’s wins…

identifying which organisation is best in an area and supporting them to shine, rather than duplicating their efforts…

as well as putting joined up messages to governments, state and federal.

The basic case for change is clear.

We need to:

Continue to build awareness;

Change behaviours everywhere that Australians work, live, learn and play;

Have governments invest more and differently;

Realise the potential of every dollar by eradicating waste, duplication, gaps and holes; and

Improve access to high quality services and supports so everyone in need gets them.

Over the past decade and a half, thanks to a bipartisan policy approach, the range and accessibility of mental health supports *has* improved in Australia.

There have been major investments in universal primary mental health care and early intervention – especially for young people.

But there is much more to do, and I know from my own time in politics that decision makers get let off the hook if advocates compete rather than cohere.

As Chair of *beyondblue,* I want to play a role in ensuring we achieve the most profound change possible by rushing together.

**Getting a job**

Last year Sarah K. Reece, an erudite and charismatic young woman from my home state of South Australia, recorded a video for the South Australian Mental Health Commission.

In it she explains a different kind of rushing together, how diversity enriches a workplace and why we need to stop filtering out people with mental illness at the recruitment stage.

Sarah knows that if she discloses her mental health diagnosis in a job application or interview and she is competing against an equally qualified person with no history of mental illness, she won’t get the job.

And that, she argues, is a lost opportunity.

In Sarah’s words:

*Somebody like me who has come through a tremendous amount of adversity, who has come out the other side with my intelligence and my humanity intact, has a massive number of skills.*

*They might be difficult to write up in a resume, but when you can get yourself through things like feeling chronically suicidal – with the challenges of the services the way they are – if you are still standing on the other side of that, you have some amazing skills to contribute.*

*We tend to think that people with mental health problems have a whole bunch of characteristics.*

*We create these misconceptions that they are disorganised, unreliable, flaky, not very skilled, not very educated. . .*

*Quite a lot of the stigma we have around mental illness is (drawn from the) characteristics of people who have not been treated very well.*

*They are characteristics of people who have been long-term unemployed.*

*They are characteristics of people who are not used to being treated as if they have worth.*

*We have created that problem and we need to be the people who solve it.*

As she explains so eloquently, deciding to disclose your mental health to your work colleagues, bosses, or even the recruitment agent, is ***not*** a step to be taken lightly.

Because it can still be career ending.

**Costs and Benefits**

But if we could create mentally healthy workplaces free of such stigma, the benefits would be enormous.

According to KPMG’s report, *Investing to Save*, released just a few months ago, mental ill-health costs the Australian economy almost $60 billion a year in direct and indirect costs, including lost productivity and job turnover.

That’s more than four per cent of Australia’s GDP.

Mental health conditions are the leading cause of the national, non-fatal disease burden – with anxiety and depression, alcohol abuse and personality disorders accounting for almost three-quarters of this toll.

Work can be incredibly good – or incredibly bad – for our mental health.

Occupational health and safety risks can be as damaging for psychological health as physical.

Three years ago, *beyondblue* surveyed more than a thousand employees from all kinds of workplaces, sectors and industries across Australia.

We found 71 per cent of CEOs and senior leaders believed they were committed to promoting the mental health of their staff.

But only 37 per cent of their staff agreed.

That is what you call a management reality check.

And supporting diversity is part of the solution.

As Sarah says:

*There is a lot of research around diversity in the workplace versus monocultures.*

*And the research found that diverse workplaces function a lot better.*

*Diverse workplaces tend to be more productive; tend to have better cultures and relationships.*

**What Heads Up Has Taught Us**

The good news is that we are on the cusp of change.

Leaders of multinationals, police forces, footy teams are starting to listen and heed the call to take meaningful action to create mentally health workplaces.

Four years ago, *beyondblue* launched Heads Up, a national initiative to support any Australian employer to build a mentally healthy workplace.

The thinking behind Heads Up is simple.

Creating a mentally healthy workplace is no different to other key business improvement projects – it requires a clear strategy, unwavering leadership, adequate resourcing, an action plan and KPIs, and a culture of continuous review and improvement.

Four years on, we have seen a seismic shift in interest and participation.

Workplace mental health has become an industry in itself, with a confusing myriad of products and solutions surging onto the market, many of dubious quality.

We know this mountain of information is confusing for employers.  How do they know which tool or resource they should use?  Which ones are trustworthy, evidence-based, reputable?

We need to make it as easy as possible.

That’s why *beyondblue* is an active member of the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance, a collaboration of national business peaks, regulators and mental health organisations.

Today the Alliance’s sole focus is to advocate for a uniform national workplace mental health framework that will provide all employers with clear and consistent information and support them to implement change.

Change that will enable them to not only meet their minimum legislative requirements, but also to realise the benefits that come from creating a mentally healthy workplace.

Business and industry are telling us that this consistent approach is what they now want.

The Alliance is developing a business case for government and industry and is committed to ensuring that this framework becomes a reality, so stay tuned for further information about this.

And in the meantime, access our Heads Up resources and start changing your workplace for the better.

A mentally healthy, diverse, inclusive, thriving workplace is one where everybody prospers.

The 2013 Deloitte report *Waiter, is that inclusion in my soup?* found that employees are twice as likely to feel engaged at work when their workplace is more diverse.

We all owe Juliet Bourke from Deloitte a debt of gratitude for this illuminating report.

It spells out that engaged employees are twice as likely to stick with their employer, advocate for their organisation and be prepared to “go the extra mile”.

This is important because replacing one skilled employee is estimated to cost 75 per cent of that person’s annual salary.

And this thing cuts both ways.

A skilled and sophisticated workforce also has expectations.

Across Australia and across industries, engagement surveys show mental health is at the forefront of staff concerns.

A mentally healthy workplace was found to be second only to salary in what matters most to employees surveyed by *beyondblue* in 2014.

And this is certainly true of the future workforce.

We know that millennials are looking for employers and positions that align with their personal values.

*Mission Australia’s* recent Youth Survey found mental health was the number one concern nominated by young Australians, particularly when coping with stress.

Achieving this kind of work environment takes leaders who are prepared to lead by example and talk openly about mental health and preventing suicide.

It might be their own story, or belong to someone they know, or be about the organisation they represent.

That is one of the most powerful things a leader can do to promote a mentally healthy workplace.

And it costs nothing.

**It’s ‘both and’…**

When it comes to mental health at work, we all have good days and bad days and occasions when we need time off.

Just as we would if we had a migraine or a bad case of the sniffles.

It’s only natural.

Imagine what we could achieve if we moved away from thinking of the **one in five** of our work colleagues with mental health conditions as different or separate.

It shouldn’t be that hard given we all have a 50/50 chance of experiencing a mental health challenge at some point in our lives.

As Sarah says:

*There is the culture of fear around mental health diagnosis. Around somebody having a label.*

*We think it means they are incompetent. We think that it means they are dangerous. We think that it means they are unskilled or that they are unsafe.*

*It makes it really hard to articulate the ways in which we are actually amazing.*

*And how fantastic we can be in a team because we have come through stuff.*

*Workplaces need to think differently about people with mental health problems. They are losing out and we are losing out.*

*We tend to think it is an ‘either or’ deal.*

*You create a workplace that is highly profitable,* ***or*** *you go the social responsibility route and you look after all the vulnerable people.*

*Rubbish.*

*Research doesn’t back that.*

*You invest in your workplace.*

*You look after your people. They look after you.*

*It is not an ‘either or’.*

*It’s a ‘both and’.*

**Conclusion**

I suspect Anna McPhee had quite a number of ‘both and’ conversations in her life.

Both electoral success and more women candidates.

Both a good government and women in key roles.

I expect she would say there is really nothing to fear from those who bring different life experiences and ways of thinking into:

* the boardroom;
* the project team;
* the political party;
* or, even, the parliament.

Decisions based on fear will always let us down.

Fear will never unite us or bring us prosperity in all its forms.

So, let’s not be ‘either or’ and let’s become ‘both and’.

Or to once again use Abby Wambach’s powerful words:

*Joy. Success. Power. These are not pies where a bigger slice for her means a smaller slice for you. These are infinite. In any revolution, the way to make something true starts with believing it is. Let’s claim infinite joy, success, and power – together.*

Because then we will do amazing things.

[Ends]