**The Art of Inclusion Episode 5 – Connecting Country**

**Speakers: Andrew Maxwell, Aunty Norma Ingram, Linda Burney, Karen Mundine**

**FULL TRANSCRIPT**

Andrew: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander listeners are warned. The following podcast may contain voices of deceased people.

Norma: [Gadigal greeting] Greetings, in the local Aboriginal language, the Gadigal of the Eora nation. The Eora nation is bounded by the Hawksbury River to the north, then the Nepean River to the west and the Georges River to the south. Within those river boundaries, we have 29 small clan or Aboriginal family groups that have been on this land for over 60 thousand years, have nurtured the land, have nurtured the waterways, the Gadigal, like all of us Aboriginal people across these great ancient lands, have looked after this land, right here. They are saltwater people. Their totem is the whale or garuwa. They have everything that they need right here on this land and they look after the land like we did. They honour Mother Earth through our songs, our dances, our artwork, and our storyline that goes right across this country, that connects us all through our stories.

It is just such a beautiful place. We all connect up. We all look after the land. What's on the land, what's under the land, and what's above the land is all important to us. The great whale is there to look after us. I want to acknowledge our elders. The elders here in Gadigal country, the elders right across our country, so proud that we belong to the longest, continuous practised culture on this entire planet. We are still here to tell those stories and to pass those stories onto you as an Aboriginal elder myself.

This is so important for us to be able to pass our language, pass our culture, pass it all onto other people, so that we're not just taking all this responsibility to care for country ourselves. All Australians, I believe now have that responsibility to look after our land, to honour Mother Earth so that we are safe. When you're walking across these lands, may our spiritual ancestors look after you and care for you so that you are safe. I want to wish you all well. I want you and your family to be well and in good health and just walk across our countries. Take your shoes off if you'd like and walk our country and feel the power of Mother Earth. Welcome to Gadigal. Thank you.

Andrew: Thank you to Auntie Norma Ingram for providing such a beautiful welcome to country. Today, we're not just welcoming you to country. We're connecting it. Exploring the cultural and professional gaps that exist for Indigenous Australians, and asking where did these issues come from? Why do they persist? What can Australian workplaces do? I'm Andrew Maxwell, and I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of this land, to the elders past, present, and their descendants on who's country this recording is taking place. This is the Art of Inclusion, a podcast from Diversity Council Australia, or DCA. In this six-part series, we peer into the lives of fascinating people, whose stories shed light on the widest social issues facing Australia today. We flip the script on who we include, who we don't, and how we can all do better.

Linda: Hello, my name's Linda Burney, and I am the member for Barton. I'm also the Shadow Minister for Human Services.

Andrew: In this episode, we meet the honourable Linda Burney Labor MP, role model, mum, and woman of many firsts.

Linda: Certainly, the first Aboriginal person that identified strongly in the New South Wales Parliament and very definitely the first Aboriginal woman elected to the House of Representatives federally. I think that a lot of it's got to do with identification. A lot of it's got to do with the era that I came through in, but it really is quite special.

Andrew: Hearing this impressive roll call, it's interesting to ask, who shaped Linda's life?

Linda: For me, there's been Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women that have really been part of my journey. I want to say that really clearly, I've got dear, dear friends who are not involved in politics, who you'll never read their name in the news of the world or anything, but they're both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women that have just been such important people in my life's journey, both professionally and personally as well. I don't think I'd be standing up if it hadn't been for those women.

Andrew: Linda's CV is certainly impressive, but it didn't come easy or without the usual challenges.

Linda: I think there are enormous challenges. Part of that is there is still a huge amount of ignorance out in the broader community about Aboriginal Australia. There are still stereotypes and prejudices that still exist. I know that they do. Things like the Aboriginal people don't work as hard or aren't as reliable. All those kind of negative stereotypes that exist in the workplace that I was dealing with when I was young and still dealing with now, unfortunately.

Andrew: Linda's response?

Linda: Don't put me in a tunnel vision view of what Aboriginal people should be like, what Aboriginality is about. I describe myself very often as a woman, as an Aboriginal person, as a mother, as a trade unionist, as an environmentalist, all of those things, that likes high fashion, that has very strict standards for myself. I also am a person that lives in the city. I’m urbanised, I'm an inner west person. I like particular sorts of food. It's that diversity that is so important for people to understand.

I am still surprised at how Aboriginal people, are seen as this sort of pan view of what the Aboriginal world is and there could be nothing further from the truth. I think once people come to terms with that diversity, it's kind of like saying well, all white people are the same. Of course, they're not. You have different interests. You have different passions. You have different tastes in music. All of the things, and the same applies for Aboriginal Australia.

Resilience is incredibly important. It's been an important aspect of my life and thank heavens I am resilient. I've had, as people would know listening to this podcast, a number of big challenges including the death of my husband, I get upset and the death of my son, but the resilience is the really important thing. It's how you actually deal with loss, that's important. You don't let it destroy you or make you bitter. You actually see it as something where you learn and grow from.

Resilience is really important to me. I really raised myself from, not entirely, I'll put that another way. I had a lot to do with my upbringing because of the different circumstances that I was in. But resilience I think is important for Aboriginal people. We have to be resilient to have survived the last 230 odd years, and to still be strong in who we are and strong in our culture and strong in our voice requires resilience.

Andrew: Loss within Indigenous communities is a complex issue and one we'll explore in a future podcast. Coming back to Linda's story, it shows that being the first can be a challenge and also an opportunity.

Karen: My name is Karen Mundine. I'm the CEO at Reconciliation Australia. I think there is great potential for change when you have I guess a critical mass of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within an organisation. There's always safety in numbers, so that's one thing. You never want to be the lone voice advocating for one thing or to be the person that gets singled out or put forward as the poster child for a particular issue. When you have a large number and create a network of peers, what you find is people become more relaxed, they feel more comfortable being themselves and bringing their full self into the workplace, and I think what you will see is that different ideas start to bubble up, so different ways of thinking, different ways of doing things. And it’s when that happens, that's when magic happens.

I think it's really important to have targets. Targets are about setting some ambition and really signalling either within your organisation or externally that this is something that is important to the organisation and that we are striving to do. I think quotas sort of become more of an imposed thing from outside, so I tend to like the idea of targets. Targets can be changed, targets can be looked at in terms of okay, we've had this ambitious target. We haven't quite got there. Let's question why not and quite often, it's about let's take a step back. They didn't get the candidates that they were looking for because they weren't advertising in the right kind of ways. They weren't using existing networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They don't necessarily have a track record in this space, so when an Aboriginal person is looking at their company, they're thinking well, there's no black fellas there. Why would I want to go work there?

Andrew: Connecting Indigenous voices and those of non-Indigenous allies is something that Linda can personally vouch for.

Linda: One of the wonderful things about being in the federal caucus is that there are two other first nations people, Patrick Dodson and Malarndirri McCarthy. We kind of really support each other and it's a very powerful voice within the caucus. I've been in other workplaces where I've been not only the only Aboriginal person, but also the only woman particularly on boards in days gone by. So that idea of having critical mass is important for two reasons.

Firstly, you support each other, but it is also something that the workplace can be very proud of and something that the workplace responds to, because you've got a louder voice, a more persuasive voice if there is more than one person. I think it also breaks down a lot of stereotypes and misconceptions. There is nothing more powerful than putting people together. You can watch every movie and read every book, but to actually sit down and talk and get to know each other. That changes attitudes. I think that's what the most powerful thing is of having critical mass in the workplace.

You've got to be proactive and work out what and who your network is. It doesn't all have to be Aboriginal. There can be many non-Aboriginal people in that sector that would offer that network, but to also for example, if it's in the private sector, there are other private companies that employ Aboriginal people. Link up with organisations like the Diversity Council that establish networks, and to also make sure that you're healthy and strong within yourself and have a good sense of identity.

Karen: Employers really need to think about the kind of workplace they're creating. Is it an inclusive workplace? Do they really believe in diversity within that workplace? When we're talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, why are employers thinking about this differently? What is it that they want to bring into their workplace that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will bring? That's thinking about what are the policies and procedures that they put in place. Thinking about are you creating a safe environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are valued as employees, that you actually are looking for the diverse opinions and views that they bring into the workplace? When you think about that, think about the policies that you put in place. Think about how are those policies brought to life. Do other employees know about these policies? What's the environment that colleagues might be put in? How does a manager manage an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who might be in the workplace for the very first time, they've never had a job before? How do you welcome people? How do you make them feel involved and valued and therefore, that they bring their best self to the office?

One of the things I talk about with a lot of our Reconciliation Action Plan Organisations, if you want to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel valued and engaged, it's about visibility. For so long, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been invisible in general society and often in workplaces. So creating visibility either through acknowledgments of country that are visible around the workplace or signage, having flags, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags in windows, on any kind of materials that go out on your job advertisements, all of these things are flying signals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that they are welcomed in this work space. Of course, that's one part of it. You've got to back it up.

It's not just about the visuals of it, but also does that really roll through into the policies that you have? Does it roll through into how all employees think about diversity and think about inclusion? Is it truly inclusive? It's one thing to say it. It's a whole other thing to do it. The Reconciliation Action Plan is based on three really simple concepts. Relationships, respect, and opportunities. It's grown out of this idea of if you show to be respectful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and you're able to build relationships, it will create opportunities both for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but also for your business because at the end of the day, a Reconciliation Action Plan or RAP is a business plan.

It's about thinking about how do businesses, organisations contribute to closing the gaps around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy, health, employment, and all of those issues? RAPs are for everyone, certainly the ones that most people would be familiar with are larger companies and ASX 200 companies, but Reconciliation Australia we’re 30 people and we have a plan of our own. The plans are about what is your intent? What are the things that you want to change? You could have three actions or you can have 30 actions. They can be quite large scale or they could be as simple as we want to acknowledge that our business sits on Aboriginal land and so we're going to put that in the front window and we're going to think about employing an Aboriginal person. That could be a RAP, so really if people are interested, they really should get onto our website, reconciliation.org.au, and find out more.

Andrew: Social and economic justice for Australia's Indigenous communities is so important and yet so unresolved that at times, many people worry about doing and saying the wrong thing.

Linda: In terms of different terminology, the terminology that I use mostly now, it's not necessarily right or wrong, it's what I use is First Nations. You will have different opinions. Some people like the word Indigenous. Some people don't. Some people like the word Aboriginal. Some people don't. It really is what the language that you believe you're comfortable with. My party, the Labor Party, has made a conscious decision that we will start using the term First Nations, but it was a conscious decision. Either three terms is fine.

Karen: I think sometimes we over complicate things. Being honest as a manager I think which is hard at times but I think if a person can be honest about the things that they don't know, it opens up a dialogue which is so important. The thing about language, people I know often get scared about what do I say? What do I call someone? A really good starting point is asking that person. As an Aboriginal person, I will always defer to an older person generally as an auntie or an uncle, but not always. It will always be my first starting point of introducing myself and finding out how they want to be addressed. Really simple things like that of opening a dialogue can create on a very simple level a whole heap of skills and ideas and thoughts. Then, that's backed up with other training.

Andrew: For Linda, youth are the future, standing on the shoulders of the elders before them.

Linda: The capacity of younger Aboriginal people that I'm seeing today is just extraordinary. Their poise, their confidence, their educational outcomes, I think the really important thing is that those young people understand that this didn't happen by magic. There was a lot of work and a lot of effort put in by people from my generation and generations prior to mine to make these opportunities available.

Andrew: Karen agrees.

Karen: I think this idea that Aboriginal people are only interested in social and soft skilled kind of jobs is not true, either. I know lots of young, ambitious, tertiary educated young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have aspirations to be CEOs, to be part of that C suite sort of climbing the corporate ladder, and that's great. I also know people who really just want to be doctors and nurses and be able to work back in their communities. All of that is really important if we're to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in workplaces right across society.

Andrew: I'm your host, Andrew Maxwell, and this has been a podcast from DCA produced by Andrea Maltman, executive produced by Lisa Annese, and with contributions from Catherine Petterson, DCA's communications director, and Simone [unclear 00:19:54]. You can keep the conversation going by reaching out on our Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter pages. If you like what you heard, subscribe to future episodes of the Art of Inclusion, either from the DCA website, dca.org.au, or from your favourite podcast player. On our website, you can access related DCA research, knowledge programs, and synopsis reports on a range of topics including inclusive leadership, words at work, and closing the work gap. Thanks for listening and I'll catch you in the next episode when this happens.

Teaser: One day, we were only in kindergarten, so five or something, and her mum said to her at the end of the day, how does Annabelle go when she has to change from her school uniform to her sports uniform with her shoelaces? Does someone help her do that? Claire said, why? Her mum said oh you know, because Annabelle's only got one hand. Claire said, oh. Does she?

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**