# Transcript for Change that Works Case Study interview with Michelle Matthews, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Manager at Bunnings

## First Nations Inclusion at Bunnings: from empathy to effective results

### Question: Tell us about Bunnings’ Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) goals to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion

Within the Wesfarmers Reconciliation Action Plan there are about five key strategic initiatives which outline our commitments. So that being around sustainable employment, that's really looking at employment parity and maintaining 3% career development. How do we support people with progression in the organisation? Our community partnerships, how do we provide local on the ground support to Aboriginal communities, our supplier engagement, and also how we celebrate and incorporate Indigenous culture into our organisations.

### Question: Tell us about Bunnings Transition to Work program and how this was implemented

We created a program which we called Transition to Work, and really that program was focused for people that unfortunately may have had a lot of life barriers. What we heard from community was that when people are in that situation, they need to have certainty around their life, and they need a lot of structure and support. So, what we did with that program is we asked our store teams to ensure that they had a permanent position, and we asked them to ensure that we could offer similar hours every week, how we really wanted them to have that certainty over how many hours, what their pay would be. And also the times in which they needed to be at work. What we also looked at was how do we have that wraparound support for the candidate and also the store leadership team. So, it was making sure we had our Indigenous advisors and also other external support networks if needed to support that candidate with their successful transition into work as well. So, we didn't necessarily look at it, okay, we have this goal of reaching employment parity, but it wasn't necessarily about just employing as many people as possible. We wanted to make sure that we were doing it the right way. We wanted to make sure that our team was being supported. And coupled with that as well, where it was possible, given we were in the challenging environment of covid, if we could conduct cultural awareness training as well. That way our store teams were also understanding and had some of the historical context around why there was disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

### Question: What other programs and initiatives has Bunnings implemented to reach your RAP objectives?

So, if I look for example at our leadership development program. We have Indigenous-specific programs. We have an Indigenous Introduction to leadership program, and that program is for high potential Indigenous team members that have the potential and are thinking about a leadership pathway. So that is a three-month course and along those three months there's three blocks and our team are supported with wraparound support by community and also by our leaders that support them with learning about what leadership is and starting them on that journey as part of that process as well. They need to do projects to show their progression. I think this is a really key program and initiative that we run within Bunnings. To that point as well is really providing that context around some of, our team may not understand the why behind why we need these leadership or employment pathway programs, but it's to... for a lot of Indigenous team members, they may not have people in their networks that are a leader, so where do you go for and ask for help? And it's also what we are doing by creating a safe space. We also have Indigenous leaders within Bunnings also participate and support in that project so that our Indigenous team member knows there's a safe space if they have like a business-related question or any question for that matter, that they've got safe space, they've got Aboriginal leaders from community, or they've got Aboriginal leaders internally within Bunnings that they can go to and feel supported and guided. And then also, I think with our leaders, they're also being supported and guided by the Indigenous engagement team and also other Indigenous leaders on their journey as they learn about some of the challenges and the barriers that our Indigenous team have with for example, career progression and understanding that that may look and feel differently for the broader population.

### Question: How has data helped guide your strategy and measure your success?

So, in terms of implementation from a store perspective, we had information as per our HRMS, we have our team that are able to provide information around their ethnicity. It's voluntary for people to self-identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Um, so we were able to track the number of Indigenous team members that we had. We had a goal of reaching 3%. As per, we had a timeframe of three years to deliver that timeframe. We also wanted to look at what we call permanent and casual parity. So that's also for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team, that they have the same level of permanency as non-Indigenous team members within our organisation. Unfortunately, we weren't at that 3%, and also, we didn't have that permanent casual parity either, and we also had the longer-term goal of creating leadership opportunities. So, we knew that to create leadership opportunities we really needed people to put down roots in our organisation. So, what we did is we were able to report on a local level, at a store-based level, the portion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members. And we also utilised this data from the ABS, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, that gave us an understanding of how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that might be in a particular region. So that also gave us an opportunity to look at potentially where we needed to target strategies. For example, in all in places of Australia that might have a much lower portion of Indigenous people, we potentially weren't going to focus our efforts as much in those regions. That's not to say that we shouldn't, but it was looking at where there was more opportunity particularly to commence the journey. Appreciate as well that stores may not always have the opportunity to take on a permanent position at any one time. Sometimes we had to wait for when there was that opportunity for permanent recruitment and engaging with our store teams around the viability and the potential for them to recruit Indigenous people on a permanent basis into their store teams as opposed to on a casual basis where there's more flexibility and more flexibility around salaries and wages. Obviously with permanency, you're adding to your base cost line. So that's why, not just for Indigenous team, but for all team, there's more considerations that get put into appointing people on a permanent basis.

### Question: How did consulting with community help strengthen your strategy?

We're very fortunate within Bunnings, I head up an Indigenous engagement team. We have an Indigenous business manager. We also have an Indigenous employment manager and we also have Indigenous advisors that sit within each of our regions. We have our Indigenous engagement team here at Bunnings. We collectively came together and we, as a team, spoke about what are the strategies and initiatives we can do to support community. So as part of that, we did go and speak to Indigenous community members. We spoke to Indigenous organisations that support employment, and we also spoke to our leaders. One of the strategies, or one of the pieces of feedback we got very loud and clear from community was around giving people a real chance and a real opportunity. So community spoke to a lot... There's a lot of programs around potentially doing a certificate, for example, in retail, and then also having an element of work experience. But that didn't always translate into actual employment. So what we heard very loud and clear from community was, give us a real job, create real opportunities, give people a real chance, and give people a fair go. Based off all the feedback that we heard, we were really conscious then about delivering programs that really delivered the outcomes for community. And really, as an Indigenous engagement team, what we were really focused on was making sure that mob got the same opportunities as everyone else. So we basically wanted to make sure that Aboriginal people got the same opportunity as everyone else in the community. So that was a really key point that we heard very, very loud and clear from our community in and of itself. What we also heard from our leaders internally within Bunnings was they really needed the proper wraparound support and tools to make this happen. And to give it a go, given we were in a space of economic challenges, and a lot of uncertainty when Covid hit, we also heard our store teams loud and clear around their support, we needed to really work with them as to how we were going to bring that to life and make that happen.

### Interview Ends

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