



Conversation Starter

Amplifying the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Melbourne's east

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence



Women's Health East
Investing in Equality and Wellbeing for Women



BOORNDAWAN WILLAM
ABORIGINAL HEALING SERVICE

Why we developed this conversation starter

The [Together For Equality and Respect](#) partnership in Melbourne's east are promoting conversations focusing on action for equality and respect for all women, as part of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

The messages, questions and list of suggested resources were co-developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Melbourne's east.

We encourage organisations and staff, community groups and families to use these to have conversations about equality and respect during the 16 Days of Activism.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Add a question to a team meeting and ask everyone to answer for themselves. Then end with a team-based answer or follow up action.
- Organise an event for your organisation or community group: you might create an art work in response to the messages and questions, show a video or use a resource to get others involved.
- Whatever you do, take a photo and share it (with consent), to inspire others and to draw attention to the importance of amplifying the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Australia's first Treaty with First Peoples is here in Victoria!

The First Peoples' of Victoria have signed a Treaty with the Victorian Government. The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria is the democratically elected body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With Community's guidance, the Assembly has led Victoria's decade long journey to Treaty. The State-wide Treaty starts December 2025.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank:

- current and former staff from Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service (BWAHS) for their expertise and advice in the development of this conversation starter document. We acknowledge BWAHS for their important work with community in Melbourne's east and contributions to the Together For Equality and Respect partnership.
- Kristy Nocker, Cora Green and Christine Wilson for their ongoing support to Women's Health East and commitment to addressing the prevention of gender-based violence through a cultural lens.
- [Amanda Wright](#), proud Palawa woman living in Melbourne's east for the art work.

Messages from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Melbourne's east

Step forward and step up. Be an ally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, communities and services. Bring your team, your organisation, your family and friends with you.

Take the next step: be open to deep listening and hearing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their communities. Practice being silent to make space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices. Encourage and resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to be heard and shape their story.

Support self-determination by allowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and communities to lead in bringing change to gender-based violence within their communities.

Respect our Cultures. Respect our Elders. Respect our knowledge. Respect Self-determination. Learn from us.

Teach others and help build communities where everyone can learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and history. In supporting education and awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture, community and history, you provide a safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their communities, which strengthens their culture and community.

Step forward and step up to amplify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's and children's voices across Melbourne's east.

Build two-way relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and communities that add value to them, recognising the cultural load that each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman and community carries.

Words, language, and actions matter. Be mindful of the words you choose, what you say, and how you engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and communities. Every interaction has an impact.

Conversation starter questions

- What can we do to amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women?
- What can we do to learn about and celebrate Victoria's Treaty with First Peoples?
- What can we do to create cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our workplaces and our services?
- How can we strengthen our relationships with and increase our support for the work of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations?
- How can we be allies who support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and leadership in our communities?

Resources

Videos

Djirra - Videos that share and promote messages relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women including *Djirra Hidden Figures Video* paying tribute to the NAIDOC 2018 theme of "Because of Her, We Can!" and Sisters Day Out sharing stories from Djirra's prevention work done in partnership with organisations including Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service across the state.

Healing Foundation Video Showcase - The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by actions like the forced removal of children from their families. The videos include the story of *Healing Foundation, How We Heal and Collective Healing*.

[Yajilarra nhingi, mindija warrma \(from dreams, let's make it reality\) animation](#)

Websites

Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service (BWAHS) is the lead specialist Aboriginal specific family violence service that provides a service in the Eastern Metropolitan Region, covering both Inner and Outer East.

First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria: [TREATY FOR VICTORIA | First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria](#)

Dhelk Dja is the key Aboriginal-led Victorian Agreement that commits Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal services and government to work together and be accountable for ensuring all Aboriginal people, families and communities are violence free. [Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way | vic.gov.au](#)

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) project brought together over 900 First Nations women and girls to a National Summit in 2023 for decision-making, innovation and celebration. The statements, videos and papers provide principles for amplifying and contributing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's leadership and strength.

Maggolee - Developed by Reconciliation Australia, Maggolee celebrates good practice in Victorian local government and aims to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, local communities and the councils that serve them together. Topics include Cultural safety, equitable outcomes and addressing historical injustices.

The Together For Equality and Respect partnership brings together organisations to advance gender equality and prevent gender-based violence in Melbourne's east. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety and self-determination is a key principle in the Strategy for 2025-2029, guiding both our partnership and our work. Check out the strategy at: [Whe.org/tfer/](#)

Key documents

Creating Change Through Partnerships - An introductory guide to partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in child and family services developed by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children.

Partnering to Uphold Self Determination is a case study of learnings about equitable partnership approaches in the family violence sector from the strategic partnership between Djirra and Safe and Equal between 2022-2024.

<https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Djirra-and-Safe-and-Equal-Partnership-Case-Study.pdf>

Acknowledgements

Each year Respect Victoria and Safe and Equal work together to support local community engagement with the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence.

Women's Health East has been funded under Respect Victoria's grassroot initiative. This has contributed to the development of resources and activities undertaken in Melbourne's east by the Together For Equality and Respect partner organisations and communities.

The resources are available to view and download at: [whe.org.au/tfer/16-days/](#)

