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STATEMENT FROM NGARARA WILLIM CENTRE

Welcome to the second edition of the Ngarara Willim Centre's newsletter. We want to start this newsletter by acknowledging the Boon wurrung and Woi wurrung people; particularly to the people of the Yalukit Willam and the Wurundjeri people we say thank you for allowing us to share your home as guests. We acknowledge you, your Elders, your ancestors and your emerging leaders who are already doing you, and us, proud. The work the Ngarara team do is only possible due to your generosity and hospitality. We do our best to take care of all of the mob that study at RMIT because we want to show that we take your expectations of us seriously.

After discussions amongst the Ngarara Willim team about this edition of our newsletter, we all felt that it was not right to simply put out a regular edition which pretends that the world is okay. It did not feel right for us to put up a 'business as usual' façade, when Indigenous students and staff at RMIT do not feel okay.

We decided that instead of a standard newsletter it was important to lend our voices to the fight for justice, and the demand for ends to systemic racism here, and overseas. We did not want that voice to have to compete with any other articles in this edition of our newsletter.

Our cover was designed to acknowledge 163 of the Aboriginal people our community has lost in custody, due to violence and negligence stemming from systemic racism. We used the Guardian's 'Deaths Inside' database, where cultural protocols and family wishes mean that sometimes only initials, age and gender are listed. Sadly, these names are only about a third of the total number of people who have died in custody since the Royal Commission was published in 1991, the number of deaths continues to grow each month.

With this edition we want to acknowledge that our families and communities experience violence, neglect and negligence at the hands of a colonial system. This is a historical and a contemporary fact. We have lost too many loved ones through premature and violent deaths, through criminalisation and incarceration, through poor health and preventable disease, through poverty and through suicide.

Our knowledges, cultures and heritage are also still disrespected and disregarded. We have been hearing loudly the passionate defences of Captain Cook statues and monuments to colonial murderers like Angus McMillan in the media. Alongside that we saw Rio Tinto 'lawfully' destroy a 46,000-year-old cultural sites in the Pilbara during

Reconciliation Week. We know that coal mining company Shenhua is planning to destroy burial sites and other sacred sites on Gomeri land around the Liverpool Plains. We know that BP have 'consent' from the WA government to destroy sites in the Pilbara that are 15,000 years old.

The underlying link between all these experiences is systemic and institutional racism. We need to continue to speak up about the countless other ways that systemic and institutional racism negatively impacts our lives and the lives of our families and our community.

Our direct experiences as Aboriginal people have made the cries and demands for justice, that are being made half a world away, resonate here. A police officer casually knelt on the throat of George Floyd for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. George Floyd died in a gutter in Minneapolis because his personhood and worth was diminished by racism. As he was being killed, George Floyd cried out for help from his dead mother. He also repeatedly said "I can't breathe". This resonates here because these were the very same words that Dunghatti man David Dungay Jnr cried out at least 12 times as he was being restrained by 5 prison guards in Long Bay jail hospital. David Dungay Jnr's name unfortunately appears on our cover.

In the weeks since George Floyd was taken from his family we have seen footage of police violence across the world.

All that we experience can be understood as acts of erasure. These are acts that aim to destroy us, to diminish us, to break us in order to make us disappear. Through violence, through incarceration, through economic and social marginalisation, through attacks on our cultures, on our heritage and knowledges we are being shown and told consistently that we don't matter, and that country does not matter.

The Ngarara Willim team want to take this opportunity to reassure all of you that we take our responsibility to our communities and to your community very seriously. We want to assure you that we will continue to make 'Blak Lives Matter' mean much more than just a slogan at RMIT. We also want to assure you that we will work with and challenge our non-Indigenous colleagues and RMIT's students to ensure that we continue to create a university and a social impact that knows that we belong and where our communities and knowledges matter.

— The Ngarara Willim Centre Team



Ngarara Willim Centre staff and students across Australia — Melbourne, Wollongong, Brisbane, Cairns

