



Initiatives of Change
Australia

June Newsbrief

WINTER 2024 ISSUE



HONOURING THE PAST
EMBRACING THE FUTURE

Transitioning in Leadership: welcoming Laurence Gray as Acting Chair

Initiatives of Change is in the business of change, including within the organisation. After four years as chair of the Board, and another seven years before that working for 'Cultural and Structural Change', Paul Ntoumos has resigned from the Board. Stepping in is Laurence Gray who will be as Acting Chair until the first meeting after the AGM on 3 August, when all positions will be vacated, and the Board will elect a new chair. Laurence is yet to announce whether he will nominate.

With 20 years of working with World Vision on international development in the Asia Pacific region, and now managing community programs for a local government in Melbourne's West, Laurence brings much experience on top of qualifications in public governance and business management. Meeting IofCA initially as a youth worker in 1990, he stayed in contact with its activities including in Cambodia, Malaysia and India. On return to Australia in 2014, he and his wife Delia again got involved, and in 2019 he was invited to join the IofCA Board, becoming chair of the Risk Legal and Audit Committee.

'As a Board member I am mindful of the effort needed to secure a strong base for future endeavours, and make sure our activities are in line with changing community perceptions of accountability. Priorities in this interim period are to progress the constitutional review, implement governance practices that align with our agreed financial guidelines and support avenues for member engagement.'

- Laurence Gray



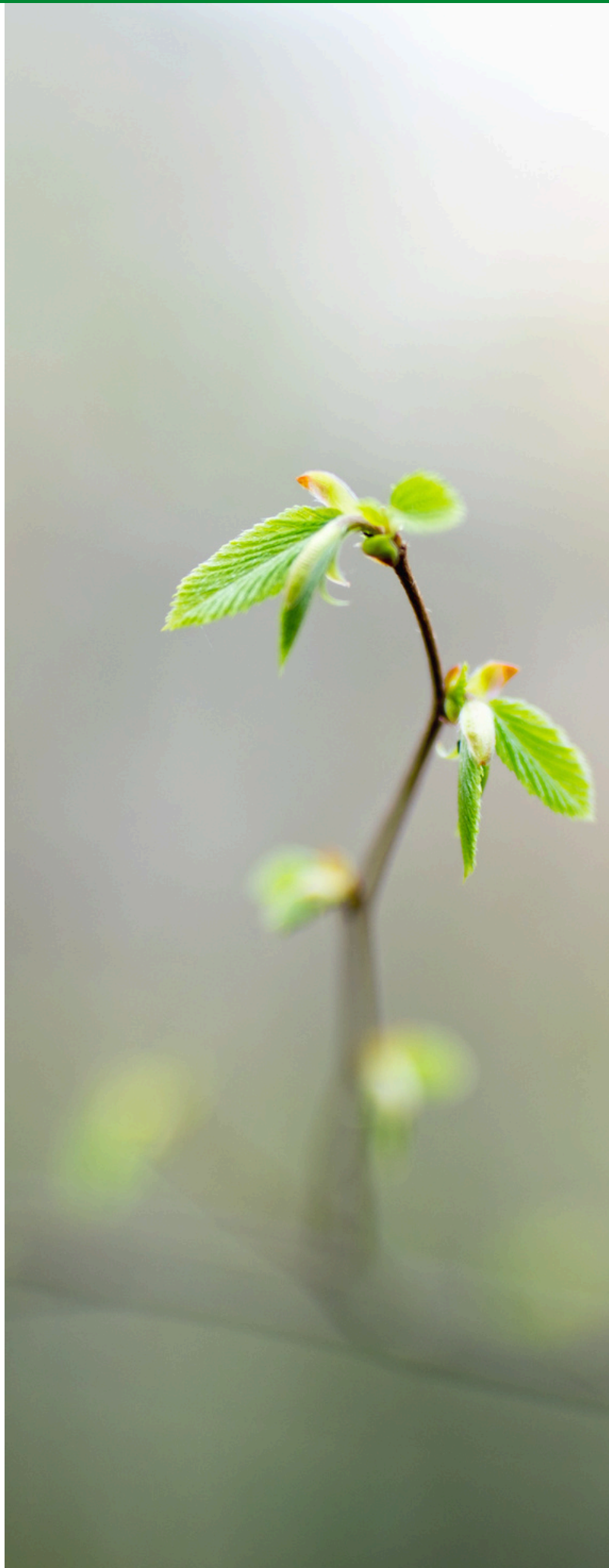
Accepting Paul Ntoumos' resignation on behalf of the Board, Laurence noted that much had been achieved over Paul's tenure during his eight years as a director. 'Paul's leadership and rich contribution will be greatly missed.'

From 2013 Paul was part of the initial Cultural and Structural Change Steering Group, guiding a process which transformed IofCA from a Council-managed fellowship-based network to a structured organization with a dedicated professional staff, volunteers and executive leadership. 'This transition was not merely structural but deeply cultural, profoundly challenging IofCA to re-imagine our potential and redefine our legacy,' Paul writes.

Appointed Chair of the Nomination and Performance Committee, he steered the then Council of Management in its transition to a Board of Directors, elevating standards of governance, introducing strategic planning, establishing the formal budgeting processes and navigating agreement on a series of property asset purchases and subdivision of valuable land.

As we look to the future, we honour the remarkable contributions of Paul Ntoumos and welcome Laurence Gray's leadership with optimism. Together, we continue to go forward with a renewed commitment to transformation and positive change.

Thank you, Paul and Judy, for your dedicated service. And to Laurence, we are inspired by your journey and look forward to the continued evolution and impact of IofCA under your guidance.





Our Community

Community Dinner, 23 May

Rob Wood

The size and variety of the crowd attending the recent Community Dinner ensured it would be a lively event! Once again, we were surprised by the twenty more than we had expected. Also, surprising was the number of helpers that were attracted to give their services! And the music with its lilting and haunting melodies added its quality to the night as did the amazing diversity of food that covered every possible space on the buffet.

Of course, the highlight of the evening was the inspiring presentation by Victor Nguyen on his work as an entrepreneur.

“Today I want to talk about change-making and how each of us can contribute to meaningful change. My journey towards becoming a change-maker began many years ago in this very room when I took part in the Life Matters course.

“Another pivotal experience was having conversations that focused on finding my vocation. Doing my MBA helped me realise how business principles could be applied to solve real world problems. It was there that *Upsol* was born.

“*Upsol* is a social enterprise focused on renewable energy solutions for off grid industrial applications. But more importantly it has a mission to alleviate energy poverty in remote communities and provide renewable access to humanitarian and aid organisations”.

Volunteers

Kathryn Farrell

Volunteers have been the life blood of Initiatives of Change, since its inception! Their hard work and dedication not only inspires the work to continue, but most importantly, it enables IofCA's message and mission to be delivered.

In these past few months IofCA have seen multiple new volunteers join the community through Turruk, Life Matters, Creators of Peace and the visit by the IofC Indonesian team.

We'd like to give a big thank you to new, and old volunteers!



Our new volunteer Adian (centre) at the Forgiveness Circle



IOFC INDONESIAN TEAM VISIT BRISBANE | SYDNEY | MELBOURNE

In an opportunity to demonstrate building bridges of friendship and trust across our diversity, an exchange visit from IofC Indonesia was organised in May-June this year. A group of five Indonesians, professionally-trained from various backgrounds and who have been working with IofC Indonesia as agents of change and peacebuilders, were selected for the visit.

The group arrived in time for the LM workshop in QLD and were active participants at the course sharing their practical experiences with the rest of the participants. (Read Miftahul Huda's reflection on his time at the workshop under Ethical Leadership)

In Sydney the group met up with IofC Sydney members – read a report from Prasanthi Hagare below.

In Melbourne the women in the group attended a Creators of Peace Circle facilitator training and refresher session at Armagh. IofC Indonesia has an energetic outreach around Indonesia and now plan to use CoP Circles in various sectors and also plan to translate the manual into Bahasa.

"I have a great appreciation for the understanding of the 'why' of Peace Circles...we will see needs being met as we start working in our communities." – Participant

The IofCA trustbuilding team briefed the team on their current work in building trust with First Peoples.

On June 8 the group contributed to a presentation and discussion on grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in Indonesia and Australia held at Armagh.

The speakers included Prof. Greg Barton from Deakin University and Siti Nurwati Hodijah from the National Commission on Violence against Women in Indonesia.

At the end of the afternoon the Australian-Indonesian collective was launched as an informal partnership between IofC Australia and IofC-Indonesia.

While in Melbourne the group participated in an exchange of knowledge about working with inter-generational trauma; they visited Conciliation-Resources (www.c-r.org) a peace-building NGO working in the Asia Pacific region and Benevolence Australia (benevolenceaustralia.org) a service-orientated Muslim community organisation. On 16 June Eid was celebrated at Armagh with an array of traditional dishes. Most importantly, interpersonal connections were forged and strengthened by the Indonesians and their Australian hosts which are the foundations for future collaborations.



Grassroots Peacebuilding Initiative forum, Armagh June 2024



lofC Indonesia Peace Building Team In Sydney

lofC Indonesia team in Sydney

Prasanthi Hagare

Graeme Cordiner from lofC Sydney invited Huda Miftahul from lofC Indonesia and other lofC Indonesians living in Sydney for an afternoon tea on 6 June. A few members of lofC Sydney and Creators of Peace including Graeme and Sallie Cordiner, Zohra Aly and Prasanthi Hagare joined the group. The Indonesian group also included Wendi Wijarwadi, Teguh and Syamsul who currently live in Sydney and were joined by Huda Miftahul and his son, Bintang Damai and Wendi's son, Keenan.

Huda and Graeme led the conversation and it was amazing how we all formed an immediate connection to each other. Stories about the connection between Aboriginal Australians and Makassan Indonesians, and an understanding about the connection between Sunni and Shia Muslims, and the interfaith work both in Sydney and Indonesia were shared.

Even the children shared what it means to be traveling to, and living in Australia. Amidst the rain, wind and a cold afternoon, we formed a very strong bond of friendship.



lofC Indonesia Peace Building Team



First Peoples Pathway

Weaving Circle April 2024 at Murnong First Peoples Gathering Place

Weaving Circle

April 2024

With great anticipation, the Initiatives of Change Turruk program hosted its first Weaving Circle on Sat 27 April at Murnong First Peoples Gathering Place (MFPGP) in Glen Iris, marking the 83rd truth telling forum by IofCA. The yarning was graciously led by Boon Wurrung weaver Bianca Easton in place of Trawoolway woman Merilyn Merm Duff, who unfortunately was struck by Covid just before the event.

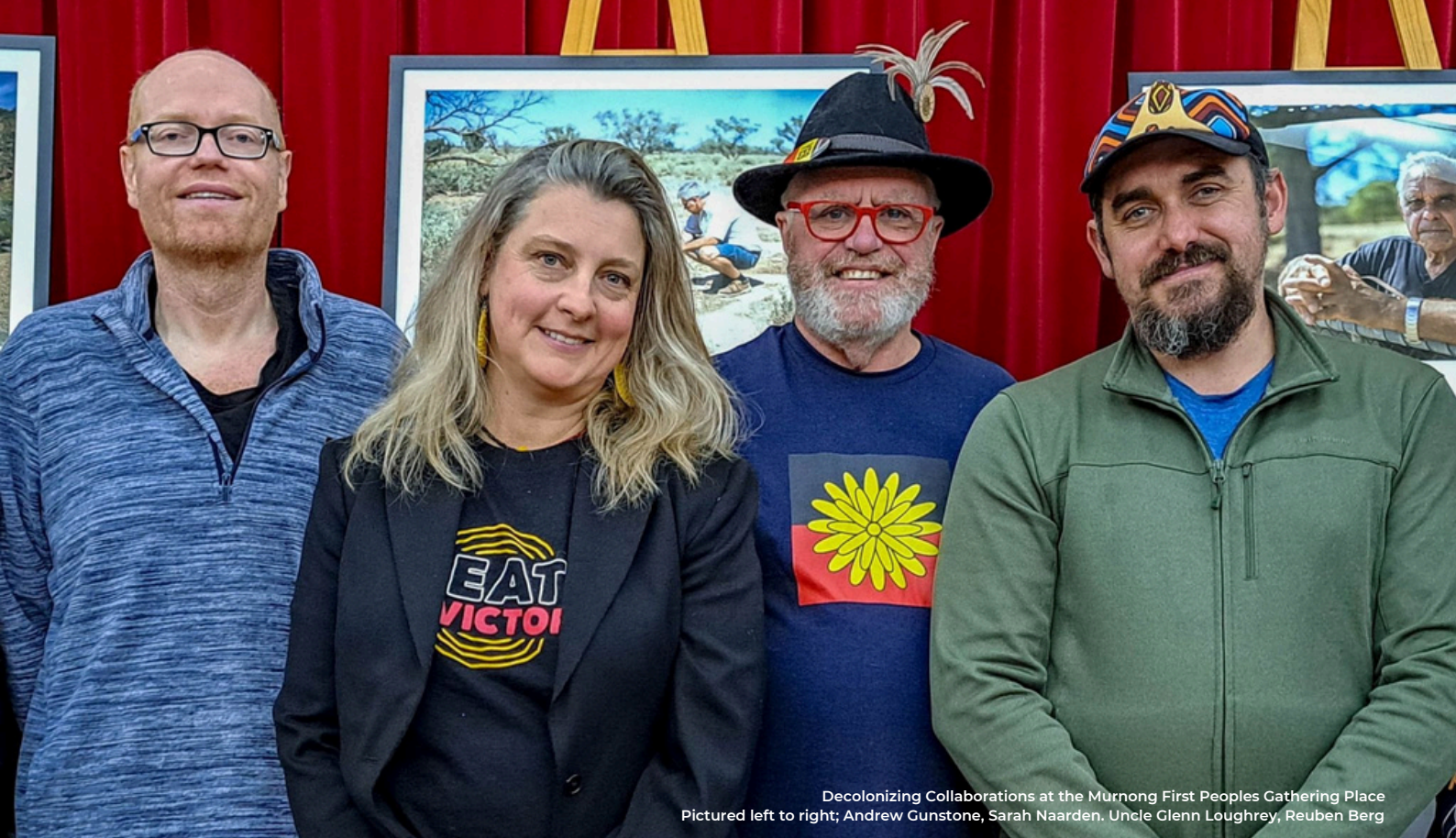
Thirty-two women gathered in the intimate space of the Murnong Gallery with a sneak peak of Uncle Les Lipwurrunga Huddleston's art exhibition. The group was treated to a brief yidaki healing before being led through the Wominjeka Garden by First Nations woman and board director at MFPGP Shorna Graham. Over the years, the old church tennis court has been transformed into a thriving Indigenous Garden where Murnong daisies with other traditional food and medicine plants can be found.

After soaking up the autumn sunshine, the group were led into the yarning circle set up in the spacious light filled hall. Anchored by earthy colours, patterns, textures and a few friendly dogs who also joined in. With courageous truth telling, Bianca opened the circle with opportunities for others to weave their stories of intercultural healing. It was then time to start weaving a Bilang -dilly bag. Traditionally this would be made to hold medicinal herbs and precious things around the neck. Some of the group chose a larger adaption of the prototype that could hold their mobile phones.

Conversations deepened as the weaving found its rhythm. Some weavers sat in silence concentrating on their well-constructed pieces. Others giggled at their first attempt and found joy in reconnecting with familiar faces and making new friendships. Most people expressed an eagerness to come together again.



Weaving Circle a April 2024 at Murnong First Peoples Gathering Place



Decolonizing Collaborations at the Murnong First Peoples Gathering Place
 Pictured left to right; Andrew Gunstone, Sarah Naarden, Uncle Glenn Loughrey, Reuben Berg

Decolonizing Collaborations

June 2024

On Saturday 1 June, Initiatives of Change Australia proudly presented Decolonizing Collaborations at the Murnong First Peoples Gathering Place. A diverse group of 82 participants joined for a dynamic panel discussion with heart centred leadership by :

- Uncle Glenn, founder of Murnong First Peoples Gathering Place.
- Reuben Berg Co-Chair First Peoples Assembly of Victoria;
- Andrew Gunstone: Co-Chair Reconciliation Victoria.

Participants then divided into four culturally immersive workshops led by First Peoples including

- Fireside yarn initiated by Uncle Glenn Loughrey, Wiradjari man who ignited a lively discussion around the fire challenging us to confront the 'colonial load' that lives within.
- Weaving Circle facilitated by Marilyn Merm Duff Trawoolway woman, who grounded participants with her cultural wisdom, weaving tips and humour.
- Feather Flowers guided by Bianca Easton, BoonWurrung woman. While crafting, the group inquired about topics :Frontiers wars, Stolen Generations and Decolonizing education .
- Wayapa Wuurrk – an Indigenous earth connection movement practise led by Mark Lumley Yorta Yorta Wiradjuri man. A sacred circle was formed in the lush Indigenous Garden, which was once an unused tennis court.

The event was inspired an invitation by Rueben Berg to collaborate, educate, advocate and activate in a Friends of Treaty pledge. In an effort to create a 'Reconciliation Festival' community atmosphere, the event was complimented by information point, exhibition and market stalls.

"Yesterday was buzzing with energy! The most dynamic session I have attended for Turruk ... I joined the Wayapa Wurruk session - Earth Connection. Amazing! ..." - Participant

Andrew Gunstone, who had been at several reconciliation events a day over Reconciliation week mentioned to Uncle Glenn, that our event was one of his favourite events.

Decolonizing Collaborations was part of the Now More Than Ever 2024 Reconciliation Week Program enabled by a \$1000 grant from Reconciliation Victoria.





Ethical Leadership

LIFE MATTERS – QLD
31 MAY – SUNDAY 2 JUNE

Life Matters QLD

Barb Lawler

The first ever Life Matters course in Queensland took place 31 May -2 June with about 50 participants and support team/facilitators at Camp Somerset – an hour and a half out of Brisbane. Like all successful ventures, it started with getting clear on ‘Why?’

A couple of years ago, three gifted young community leaders: Mu Shwe, Amiel Nubaha and Naome Rusera (all Caux Scholars alumni) attended Life Matters courses in Melbourne and Sydney and saw its potential for Queensland. With guidance from IofCA elder Barbara Lawler and support from IofCA Lead Trainer & Facilitator Mike Lowe, a team started meeting regularly and a venue was found and booked.

Early meetings focused on a deep searching for the purpose of this Life Matters.

This is a summary of reflections from Amiel, Mu and Naome: ‘We look forward to building a strong sense of community, having space to reflect on our community / leadership roles, and finding life-direction, through practising values to build bridges across the divides – in hearts, lives and communities. We will be learning to be the change we want to see around us – bridging personal, family and community divides or wherever we are led to act; seeking inner direction on taking personal leadership and finding healing – both personally and historically; taking personal leadership to fulfil our purpose in life and work and being part of a network for community and global change.’

Life Matters Qld Continued...

This clarity on the purpose helped form partnerships. With Naome being Executive Officer with the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, a partnership commenced with an agreement that ECCQ would initially sponsor five African-Australian participants to develop their capacities as leaders and then support them to co-create an ongoing program to address community needs.

We built on Amiel's connection with the Pasifika diasporas and his participation last year in Tonga in the Young Pacific Leaders Summit. Five came from the Future Ancestors group in Brisbane with representatives from the Papua New Guinea and Samoan diasporas who are potential young leaders. We also had a participant directly from Samoa.

It was wonderful to have First Nations input and participation with Aunty Barbara Pershouse and her daughter Ann-Maree Long who agreed to come and facilitate a weaving workshop for us. A special moment came after they did the Acknowledgement of Country on Friday night when an elected representative from the local council spoke movingly about National Reconciliation Week and acknowledged the tragic local history, including a massacre.

At the end of the course the energy was amazing. Several spoke of the life-changing impact of weekend, of the deep trust formed across diverse religions and ethnicities, of decisions to listen to the 'inner voice'. Around 20 stepped forward volunteering to help organise the next Life Matters in Queensland.

Naturally pioneering something new like this in Queensland provided many opportunities to learn! Watch this space!

Life Matters QLD

Aunty Barbara Pershouse & Ann-Maree Long

Where to begin... Attending the three-day Life Matters camp was a profoundly enriching experience.

My daughter Ann-Maree and I were thankful to meet Barbara Lawler a few months ago at a 350 Meanjin, Our Islands Our Home event – where we were weaving our stories on stage, with reflections and raffia. How precious that we can fast forward to today, and reflect on the new friends and spiritual connections we have made, through IofCA. At the camp, we were thankful to connect with individuals from diverse corners of the globe. This allowed us to exchange cultural narratives, fostering a deep appreciation for our shared humanity. The stories we shared were windows into our worlds, revealing unique traditions and common dreams. Conducting a weaving workshop was a highlight, enabling me to share a significant aspect of my heritage. The intricate art of weaving not only captivated the participants but also created a tangible connection to Indigenous Australian culture. As a weaver, I use weaving for healing, story telling, and cultural practices. It was beautiful to share and observe how quickly the group picked up this ancient technique, enjoying all it had to offer.

This camp also provided precious moments of reflection, particularly in the practice of Acknowledging Country with my daughter. This act reaffirmed our bond with the land and honoured the Ancestors who have cared for it over millennia. It was a healing experience, offering us space to process and share our experiences as Indigenous Australian women. Together, we celebrated our identity, resilience, and the rich cultural legacy that we carry forward. It was special to show participants from across the globe, how we can Acknowledge Country by expressing it through nature. Sitting with the birds, placing a hand on an old tree, and reminding the spirits – we are still here, collectively.

The camp was more than just an event; it was a journey of learning, healing, and connection. It reinforced the importance of cultural exchange and highlighted the strength found in unity and understanding. We appreciated the music exchange, the truth telling, the laughs, the tears, the trust, the food, and the love! This experience will forever remain a treasured memory, inspiring continued cultural engagement and advocacy.

A huge galangoor nyin (thank you) to the team at Life Matters, Initiatives of Change Australia (IofCA) and the Pacific Fund for supporting our involvement.

Life Matters QLD

Miftahul Huda

Brisbane has brought energy to me, and all of the IofC Indonesia delegates. In 2005, Leaders from Indonesia's two most prominent Muslim organisations were at the Brisbane IofC conference and came back refreshed and inspired. We had Abdul Mukti, Habib Chrizin and Rozy Munir. The late Rozy Munir's roles included being chair of Nahdlatul Ulama, Minister of State Ownership, and Indonesia Ambassador for Qatar. He shared with me that the people he met at the IofC Brisbane conference were inspiring; they were more Muslim than we were in Jakarta. Since then, I have felt the same energy as he did. Munir opened his office for us as we prepared for the Asia Pacific Youth Conference (APYC) in 2006. He opened his home and all his networks and resources to make APYC possible.

This time we came as an IofC Indonesia team to Brisbane for Life Matters and to Melbourne for public discussion, CoP facilitation training, and collaboration activities with IofC Australia. We would like to have a longer connection with IofC Australia through collaboration, leadership, and friendship.

I felt inspired and privileged to be at LMC in Brisbane from 31 May to 2 June 2024. I came with the spirit of just being there and contributing to some of the sessions.

The family group as a safe space was amazing. I had an Aboriginal woman in my group – my first time being in circle with such a dynamic and deep reflection from a young Aboriginal. She shared her connection with nature, and the following day we joined her ritual to greet nature and talk to the tree to pay respect and pray.

Having such a diverse group of young people from the Pacific, such as PNG, Samoa, and a bunch of vibrant Africans, plus Afghanistan and Myanmar, made this LMC unique, special, and full of learning.

I learned how a team of elders like Barbara, Mike Lowe, Ann Holland, and Loraine Birse and emerging leaders like Amiel, Mu, and Naomi, who were alumni of Caux Scholars, worked together to make LMC possible in Brisbane with support from Sudharshan and Prashanti from Sydney.

With less responsibility as an organizer for LMC I had space to learn about myself, my emotions, and my wounds and to be able to share them in a family group with my wife. In this way, we learned together and were at peace in this program after being busy in Indonesia. I gained inner strength and energy by having sessions in small groups and learning from other stories.

The topic of trust-building and addressing inter-generational trauma has been my highlight – seeing how people came to Australia with their cultures and traditions, needing to adapt to a new culture while dealing with family inside and outside the country. One participant from Samoa's action plan was to engage the younger generation to create a safe space for personal transformation to connect with themselves, family, and their community.

Overall, I was amazed at how this LMC was designed and how people took this chance to reflect deeply and enjoy being with one another. In the last session, almost everyone committed to help organise the next LMC. What an incredible team in Brisbane!



Life Matters QLD



Life Matters QLD



Life Matters QLD



Life Matters QLD



Life Matters QLD



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Life Matters QLD

Healing and Reconciliation

CREATORS OF PEACE

Creators of Peace Community of Practice Tanya Fox

The CoP CoP group came together on 5 May, thanks to Maria for making it possible by sharing her home and heart.

The group was invited to bring a flower and a photo of ourselves at a young age, to explore the topic The Divine Feminine. As we co-created a safe, loving and sacred Circle, we shared our personal experiences and stories about what the 'divine feminine' meant to us. We looked at our current relationship with the divine feminine energy, how we may be alienated from it, and how we are connect to it, in our lives today. The photograph we each shared was to honour our own journey, and the lineage of the women in our families before us. The flower was a symbol to honour the divine feminine within us and connect with its essence. The photos and flowers were placed on an altar. Some of us related to the divine aspect, some to the feminine and some just to being a fully expressed human being.

"CoPCoP is a safe space. It is about connecting and showing up as 'ourselves' and sharing, warts and all". - Maria

An Evening with CoP Melbourne Aasha Gray

The CoP Melbourne-based team led by Delia put on our first taster event! The evening's activities centred around Gathering Points 'What is peace to you?', and 'Qualities of a peace creator.' Hosted in the west at the Holy Trinity Parish Centre, Williamstown. There were 12 participants and 6 volunteers from CoP. The group was dynamic and cheerful. You could feel the joy in the room!

Thanks to Delia, Ayak, Chebet, Rera, Abul, Elise, and Aasha, we were able to put on a wonderful evening.





Photo Credit: Amnesty International

Creators of Peace Refugee Week Tanya Fox

The Creators of Peace team joined the 2024 Refugee Week celebrations in Sydney, held in in partnership with the Mount Druitt Ethnic Community Centre (MECA) at the Mount Druitt TAFE campus. The day was a wonderful celebration of welcoming refugees into Australia and to celebrate the contribution they make to our multi-cultural society under the theme, 'Finding Freedom: with a focus on Family and connections'.

The event was attended by close to 200 people representing 28 different origins. The event was a festive smorgasbord of cultural dancing and singing acts, an art workshop, a drumming workshop, an Afghan jewellery stall, Refugee advisory stalls, a BBQ lunch, and five Story Sharing Circles facilitated by CoP facilitators Zahra Matar, Prasanthi Hagare, Shoshana Cochrane, May Newin and Tanya Fox.

The Story Sharing Circles offered participants a rare opportunity to express deeply held thoughts and feelings on the two questions:

- Who is a significant person friend or family member that has had an impact on your life and why they hold a special place in your heart?

- What comes to mind when you hear the word 'Freedom' and what does it mean to you?

CoP facilitator Zahra brought along with her eight of her year 11 students from Al Zahra College as part of their social service curriculum, which added to the wonderful mix of age, culture, breadth and richness of sharing and learning from each other. There was tears, laughter and deep wisdom shared that created an instant bond within each group. All five facilitators came away feeling immensely privileged to have been part of their participant's heartfelt sharing.

'We all left the event feeling grateful and uplifted having seen such unity and harmony in our diverse community.'





CREATING SPACE

Creating Space is an online forum where the national (and occasionally international) community gather on the first Monday of each month, to connect and renew purpose. We create a loving space for quiet reflection, deep listening and open sharing.

2024 to date has seen a massive change in Creating Space, inspired by the young people specifically from the Queensland team, and which has led to increased participation at the sessions.

The theme of *Forgiveness and Healing* that started at the beginning of the year continued into the second quarter of the year.

In April, Amiel Nubaha, a leader in the Rwandan community, who coordinates the Rwandan genocide memorial in Canberra,

presented a thorough, brilliant, and statesman-like treatise on forgiveness and healing.

In May Mu Shwea lawyer from the Karen community in Burma shifted gears completely to what it means for us to forgive close relatives, which is sometimes more challenging than we expect!



Amiel Nubaha -
Creating Space April Guest Speaker



Executive Director Visits Rwanda Gender Equality Memorial. Image sourced from UN Women via Flickr.

REFLECTION – AMIEL NUBAHA

IofC Queensland team member Amiel Nubaha in his role as the Chair of the Federation of Rwandan Communities in Australia Inc was instrumental in bringing the Australian Rwandan community together at the Australian Parliament in Canberra on 20 April for a national commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide.

Amiel was born and raised in a refugee camp before migrating to Australia through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Resettlement Program. He holds degrees in Law, Criminology and Conflict Resolution and is an experienced Mediator, Peacebuilder and Restorative Justice Practitioner. Now proudly calling Australia home, Amiel is dedicated to building bridges across global divides through his work with IofCA.

'To forgive is not to erase or deny the pain of the past but instead release ourselves from the chains of resentment and open our hearts to healing and transformation in our beautiful country we now call home — Australia.'

'Forgiveness is a courageous choice — a choice to break free from the cycle of hurt and retaliation; a choice to extend compassion to ourselves and others; and a choice to reclaim our inner peace and freedom. Through forgiveness, we break free from the chains of victimhood and emerge as agents of positive change...'

'I hold onto the hope that despite the pain and sadness, all people of Rwandan background will achieve true reconciliation and coexist peacefully. Through these local commemorative initiatives that resound global impact, I hope that Australia can be a model of healing and reconciliation...'

-Amiel Nubaha

Read his reflection here:

<https://www.youngausint.org.au/post/a-reflection-on-healing-and-resilience-30-years-after-the-genocide-in-rwanda>