

# *Mercy Advocacy*

*“We are called to find Christ in them .....  
to listen to them.....  
and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God  
wishes to share with us through them.”*

*- Evangelii Gaudium 198.  
(Pope Francis speaking of how he wants  
'a church which is poor and for the poor')*



*Seeding the Future with Others  
August 2014*

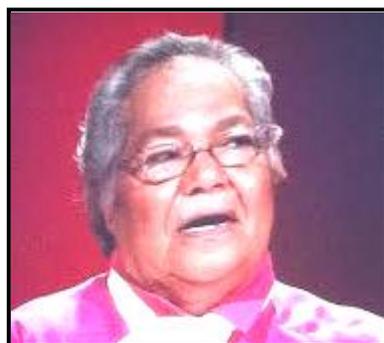
*This month **Mercy Advocacy** is a tiny attempt to stand back from our main society, to shift our feet a little, and see in prayer and reflection, if we can move more closely to the edges. There we may hear more clearly the voices of people who are living marginalized in our society, whose dignity as persons is being trampled on. Solidarity is a journey which begins with truly hearing the ones no one wants to hear.*

*At the Mercy Spirituality gathering held on 19 July, we were privileged to listen to one of our own when Gwen shared with us the harrowing experience of her flight with two of her sisters from Vietnam. Her parents and two younger sisters followed later in the hope of finding elsewhere safety and freedom.*



## **To begin we listen to the voices of *First Nations Persons*:**

### ***I am not the problem***



You know, I have a culture. I am a cultured person. (*Speaking Arrernte*) I'm talking another language. And my language is alive. I am not something that fell out of the sky for the pleasure of somebody putting another culture into this cultured being. John [*Pilger in Utopia*] shows what is an ongoing denial of me.

**ROSALIE KUNOTH-MONKS**

I am not an Aboriginal or, indeed, Indigenous. I am Arrernte, Alyawarre, First Nations person, a sovereign person from this country. (*Speaking Arrernte*) This is the country I came out from. I didn't come from overseas. I came from here. My language, in spite of whiteness trying to penetrate into my brain by assimilationists – I am alive, I am here and now – and I speak my language. I practise my cultural essence of me.

Don't try and suppress me and don't call me a problem. I am not the problem. I have never left my country nor have I ceded any part of it. Nobody has entered into a treaty or talked to me about who I am. I am Arrernte Alyawarre female elder from this country. Please remember that. I am not the problem.



**TAUTO SANSBURY**, Chair of the Nerrunga People of South Australia and a long-serving health manager is concerned at the silence, the loss of hope, the ill-health in many communities that is leading many, especially the young, to early death. Just as did *Rosalie Kunoth-Monks*, he emphasises that his people were here, are still here and will remain here. He believes constitutional recognition will make Australia a ‘more honest country.’

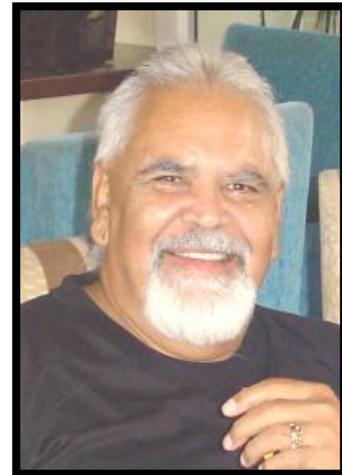
## Story of Tauto Sansbury

Next year I’ll turn 65.

I’ve outlived my dad, who died at 49, and my oldest brother, who also died at 49. I’ve outlived three other siblings too – and a niece and two nephews.

Our family is no different to so many others across Aboriginal Australia.

Heartbreak, hard lives and ill health are taking too many of our people too young. We can so easily be lost to the trauma. And yet somehow, still I dare to hope for a better future for our people.



**TAUTO SANSBURY**

I dare to hope because our people have endured and survived and adapted and conquered challenges on a huge scale before. And we are still here. Aboriginal people were here in 1788 – and for thousands and thousands of years before that.

If Australia had told this truth from the beginning I believe we’d be in a better place today. But that silence has allowed the exclusion of Aboriginal people for generations – and the legacy of that treatment lives on with us today. That legacy is here in the grinding poverty and chronic illness and the despair that leads so many of our young people to suicide.

So many have lost their land, customs, traditions and history. So many have lost cause for hope. And so when people ask me what difference it would make for our people to be recognized in the Constitution, I say that it begins with that acknowledgement.

A better future begins with the acknowledgement of a simple truth and a truth in constitutional recognition. We were here. And we are still here. For while that simple truth continues to be not acknowledged by our country in its highest



document, how can we expect things to get better? And so I strongly support constitutional recognition of our people. I think it will be a benefit, long after I am gone, for our future generations to see that truth acknowledged.

How could it not help stem the loss of hope, for our young people to see millions of Australians vote to acknowledge our presence and our history? How could it not help our old people, who have carried our losses so heavily for so long, to see that day, which many would never have imagined would come?

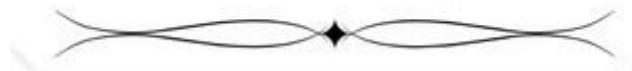
Knowing who you are and where you come from improves your life and your outlook on life. When we talk about Aboriginal people and our cultures, we are talking about thousands and thousands of years of history and culture and custom and tradition in this land. So much of that has been lost but we can try to stop the further loss and we can try to keep what remains strong for future generations of Australians to understand it, to learn from it and build on it. And it would make Australia a more honest country.

By removing those racial discrimination sections of our Constitution, we'd be recognising that what was done in the past shouldn't continue into the future. And we'd be recognising that it's time to create a new history together, a history that embraces our historical customs and traditions.

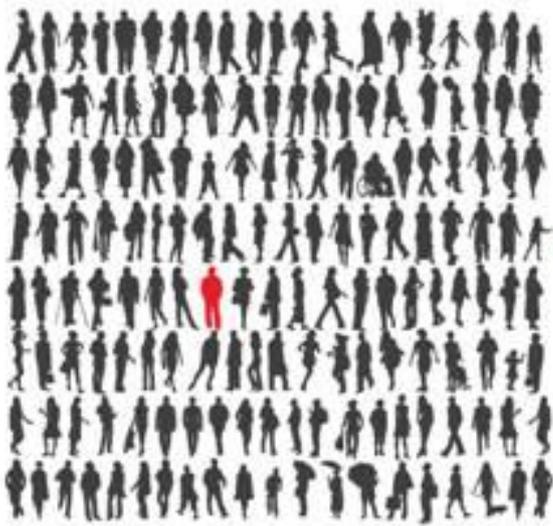
The Kiwis understand that Maori culture is at the heart of New Zealand's culture. It's part of their identity. It's part of who they are. And the acknowledgement, the recognition of that, doesn't take anything away from anyone else. It enriches the whole nation.

And so I say to non-Aboriginal Australians who may doubt or fear: you can't be as one while you are still excluding Aboriginal people from the proper process of moving forward. If you, too, want unity for our nation, this recognition is an important part of creating unity, connection, mutual respect and cohesion.

And to my black brothers and sisters, I say: there is nothing to fear from this. This is something on which we can stand together as one, after so many long decades in which white systems and processes have forced us apart. This is something that will honour our ancestors and their achievements as well as their long fought battles for equality. This is something that will lighten many hearts that for too long have been heavy with grief.



## What is happening to those experiencing homelessness



On any given  
night in Australia  
**1 in 200** people  
are homeless



*There are currently 105,237 people in Australia who are homeless.*



### What is happening in Brisbane:

- **500 Lives 500 Homes:** Mater is one of thirty organisations who have collaborated to support this campaign working to break the cycle of homelessness for families, young people and adults in our community who are homeless or vulnerably housed. This campaign connects with the Queensland Government's Homeless Housing Strategy to deliver a co-ordinated approach in Brisbane. According to research compiled as part of this campaign, 537 of those captured by the study were younger than seventeen years. Almost half of the children from homeless families were younger than five while 80% were younger than thirteen. The co-ordinator of West End Micah Projects, **KARYN WALSH** said *500 lives 500 homes* is the first project in Australia to collect data about homeless families.



- **Rosies**, a community outreach group, is providing *Backpack Beds* to those who have lost their homes, moved in to their cars, lost their car through inability to pay rent and fuel. One man describes his as *'my own private house which makes me feel special'* He explains his situation thus:

*"We are not all bad, just normal people doing it a bit hard... I worry about getting wet tonight or moved on... I have to find a shop doorway or verandah. If you're lucky you can get into an underground car park... I'm lucky if I average 4 hours sleep a day...you don't know what's coming... some think 'he's homeless' so they bash you..."*

- **Homeless Persons' Week**; 4-10 August 2014, will look at how ignoring homelessness causes significant costs to individuals, government and society.



## **How to make the voices of *asylum seekers* heard.**

**TONY JONES**, interviewer on Q & A, said recently to an audience member

*"We've had enough questions about refugees. We don't need any tonight."*

The implication was: how boring. The real entertainment is elsewhere in my show, our society.

Mercies are faithful. We are in for the long haul.

- **'Turn Back the Indifference' Reflection by the Uniting Church in Victoria.** The Commission for Mission, knowing the limbo that many asylum seekers find themselves in while waiting for their claims for asylum to be processed, has developed a very moving, thought-provoking reflection following the recent suicide of a young Sri Lankan asylum seeker, **LEO SEEMANPILLAI**. Well worth viewing and recommending for wider use. The video can be watched online or can be downloaded from:

<http://bit.ly/1hMLjfZ>



- The Federal Government has completely cut core funding to the **Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)** the peak body for education, authoritative information on refugee issues and strategies for advocacy:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.au/](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/)

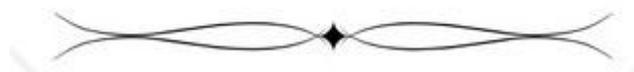
Chief executive officer, **PAUL POWER**, is seeking more support from Australians who see the need for a strong and credible community voice on refugee policy:

*“The withdrawal of our core funding represents a tiny cost saving for the Government - less than half of the annual salary of a Minister - but it is close to one quarter of our organisational budget. It will hurt us but we have no intention of reducing our small staff team or allowing this to distract us from raising a voice for justice and compassion for refugees.. We will be appealing to our supporters to help us become an even stronger voice for humane and common-sense policies for refugees and asylum seekers.”*

Donate at: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/donate](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/donate)

Postal address: RCOA  
Suite 4A6  
410 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

- An article by refugee advocate, **JULIAN BURNSIDE** encourages us to stand back to review what has led to our violent cultural response towards those who seek to reach our shores. It is a broad overview of the roots and development of our asylum seeker policy and practice.





**Compiled by Genevieve Caffery and Dolores Creevey  
on behalf of the Members of the Reference Group**

