

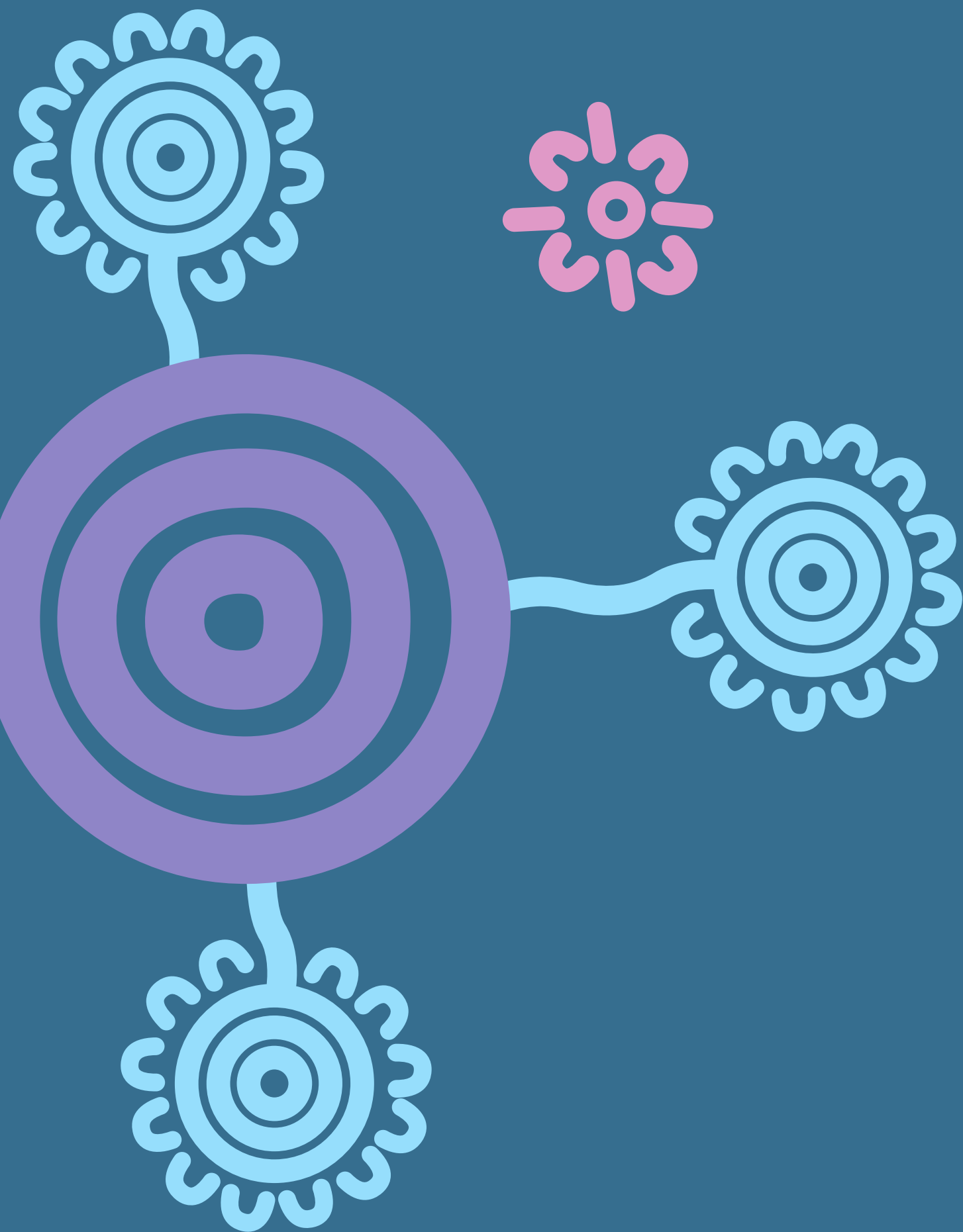


**HousingFirst** 

# Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

June 2023 – November 2024







## About the Artist: Mya Wilson

Mya is a proud Wurundjeri woman. She completed her secondary schooling at Eltham college where she received an Arts Award. Mya now works for the QArt Studio and Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre.

Mya has attended various art courses including Marngo Designing Futures Course (Swinburne University, 2017) and a Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Art Project Sponsorship, Victoria University, 2017).

Mya has been privately commissioned by many individuals and large National companies including the Victorian government. One of Mya's paintings has been selected for national company branding (lanyards, emails and merchandise) in 2021 and a piece selected for front cover of a calendar in 2021. She was previously a NAIDOC Poster Winner. Her art has been displayed in various exhibitions. You can currently find some of her works on display at the Outdoor Gallery and QArt Gallery, Melbourne.

### **Artwork: *Culturally Connected***

This painting is about cultural diversity. The solid lines running through the painting convey the message that regardless of one's background or abilities, anyone can accomplish their dreams, such as purchasing a house or a car. This can be achieved by coming together and having meaningful discussions. The pink and turquoise wavy lines in the backdrop symbolise the journey towards one's goals and the occasional obstacles that may arise along the way. These colours also represent diverse genders, signalling that everyone can realise their dreams with hard work.

The three purple spiky circles represent the local area where I live and emphasise the importance of respecting the land on which people are building and buying, which can be achieved by coming together. Personally, I perceive purple as an appealing gender-neutral colour, while also embodying qualities of bravery and vision. These values are necessary for achieving one's goals when pursuing a dream.

# A message from Reconciliation Australia

## Reconciliation Australia welcomes HousingFirst Ltd to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.

HousingFirst joins a network of more than 2,200 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes.

These outcomes contribute towards the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

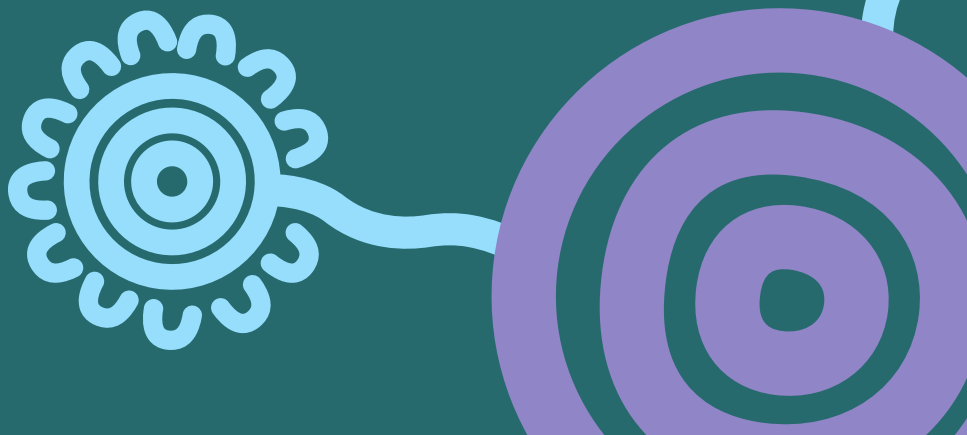
It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.



This Reflect RAP enables HousingFirst to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations HousingFirst, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

**Karen Mundine**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Reconciliation Australia



# A message from our Chair and CEO

**We are very proud to share HousingFirst's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and formally join the collective action towards reconciliation. Our RAP is a pivotal step in HousingFirst's reconciliation journey and reflects the vision of our staff, Board and residents for an equitable and inclusive nation.**

HousingFirst recognises the importance of reconciliation for all Australians, and the role we all have to play in working towards a reconciled nation. We are committed to taking actions towards reconciliation and fostering inclusive and culturally safe workplaces and communities.

First Nations peoples are overrepresented in social housing, social housing waitlists and homeless populations, and we believe that equitable access to safe and affordable housing is crucial for reconciliation. As an established housing association, our vision is to provide affordable housing accessible to all – providing culturally safe housing is an integral aspect to ensuring this is safe and accessible for all people.

This RAP is a formal commitment of the journey we have already embarked upon, and we look forward to seeing its actions implemented. Our previous work in reconciliation has included building partnerships with First Nations organisations, increasing our engagement with First Nations suppliers, and raising awareness among staff through regular training and celebration of important events such as National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.

Over the last year, HousingFirst representatives and external First Nations advisors have been working on the development of this RAP, engaging staff and residents to best represent our organisational commitment to reconciliation. It has been very powerful to see the engagement and commitment that our staff and residents have demonstrated in developing the RAP. We look forward to implementing its actions and continuing our work in this space.

Reconciliation is an ongoing journey, and this RAP will allow us to lay the foundation as we continue this journey.



**Janine Kirk AO**  
Chair  
HousingFirst



**Haleh Homaei**  
Chief Executive Officer  
HousingFirst



# Our Vision for Reconciliation

**HousingFirst's vision for reconciliation is for First Nations peoples to have equal access to safe housing and life opportunities, and for the histories and cultures of First Nations peoples to be recognised and valued as pivotal elements of Australia's history and identity. In recognition of First Nations peoples' deep connection with Country, we will ensure our community housing is a safe and inviting space for First Nations peoples to connect with land and place.**

We are committed to building understanding of First Nations histories and cultures, and creating environments where people of all cultures and backgrounds feel safe and that they belong. We believe that self-determination for First Nations peoples is vital for reconciliation and will continue to work in partnership with our First Nations residents, staff and stakeholders to realise our vision. We are committed to ensuring that our workplaces, services and housing are inclusive, culturally safe and community focused.

HousingFirst recognises First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners of Country in Australia and that sovereignty has never been ceded. Australia's history of colonisation, including the dispossession of land and many racist policies, has caused incredible devastation and loss for First Nations peoples. We believe it is important to acknowledge this history in order for us to take effective action towards reconciliation. We will work together to remove the ongoing impacts of colonisation, including the additional and intersecting barriers that First Nations peoples can often face when accessing opportunities and fundamental needs such as housing. We believe that access to safe, affordable and secure housing is a fundamental human right and a gateway to dignity, education, financial wellbeing and health.



*Image: HousingFirst staff attend a tree planting event at our newly opened Botanical Apartments for NAIDOC Week 2021.*

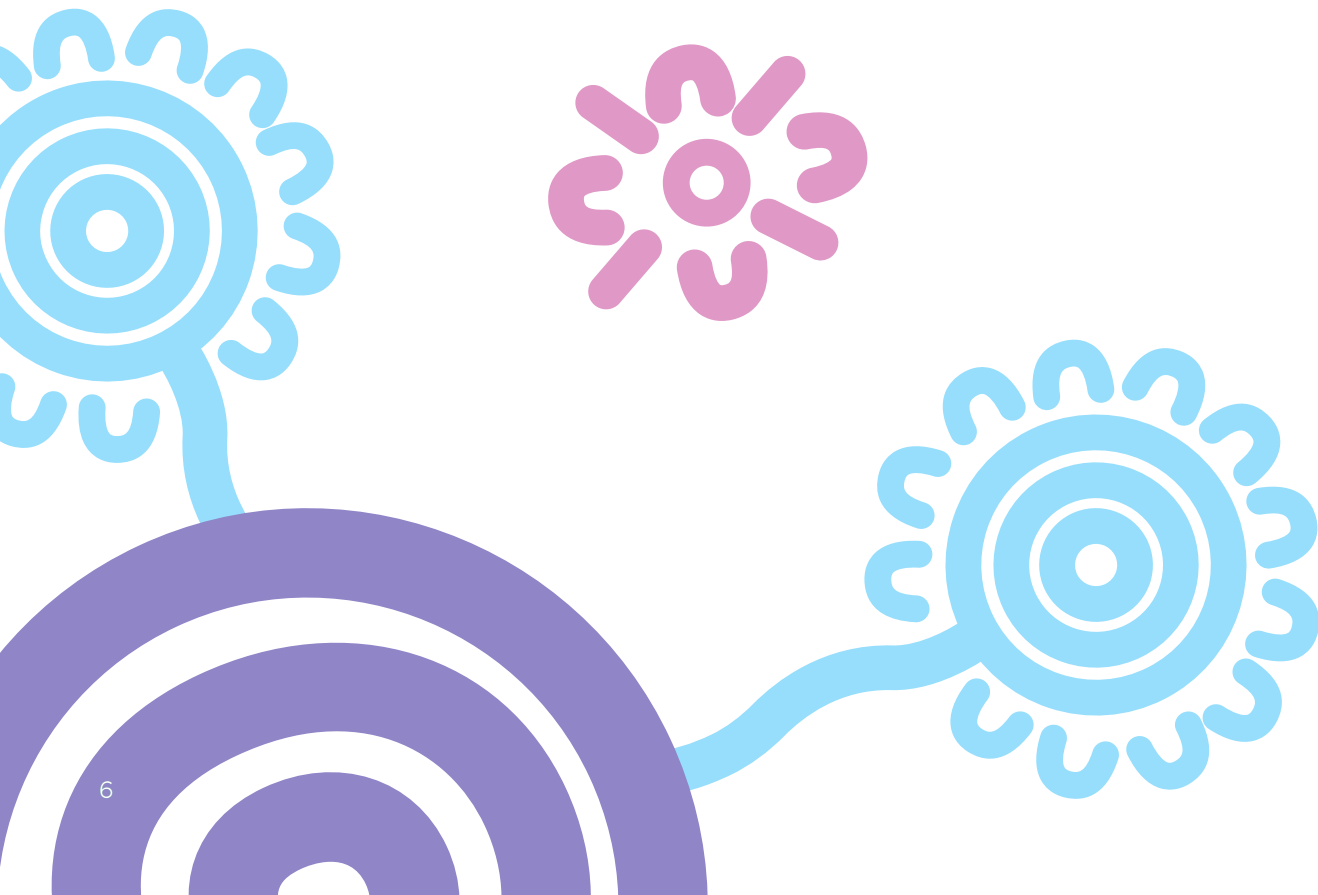
# Our Business

**HousingFirst is a regulated not-for-profit community housing provider, operating on the unceded lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin nation. Our core business is to provide community housing to people from the Victorian Housing Register, and we act as a developer, asset manager, tenancy manager and community development provider for the residents in properties across our portfolio. We manage the tenancies of more than 2,000 people across metropolitan Melbourne, in properties either owned or leased by HousingFirst. Currently around 2% of our households are First Nations\*.**

We currently employ 51 people, and do not currently collect data on whether staff are First Nations. Through this RAP we aim to implement culturally safe data collection practices.

HousingFirst operates in metropolitan Melbourne (Naarm), across 13 Local Government Areas. Our operations are run on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri peoples. Our head office is on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung peoples in the suburb of Melbourne, and we have smaller offices onsite at some of our properties to provide onsite tenancy management services. These are currently located on Boon Wurrung land in St Kilda and Wurundjeri land in Ashwood, with new onsite offices coming in Parkville (June 2023) and Preston (2024).

*\*Note on language – HousingFirst uses the term First Nations to be inclusive of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We have chosen to use this language as guided by our First Nations advisors.*





*Image: HousingFirst resident, Anisha, cooking for the resident-led NAIDOC week lunch in 2022.*



# Our RAP

**HousingFirst is committed to the principle of reconciliation and working together to support the ongoing process to ensure the sovereignty of First Nations peoples. HousingFirst is a values-driven organisation, operating on First Nations land, and we believe strongly in working in partnership with the Traditional Owners of those lands and First Nations peoples more broadly towards reconciliation. We believe the principle of reconciliation is vital for all Australians and that this need is particularly highlighted in our industry, given the overrepresentation of First Nations peoples experiencing homelessness or living in social housing – a direct result of colonisation and past colonial policies.**

The continuous connection that First Nations peoples have to Country, and the relationships that land and community have to sustainable and safe long-term housing make reconciliation and the pillars of respect, relationships and opportunities vital in developing and managing culturally sensitive community housing. We also recognise the intersecting natures of different identities, and the additional barriers that may be faced by some First Nations peoples in accessing safe and affordable housing – for example Brotherboys, Sistergirls and other members of the LGBTQIA+ community – and are developing a RAP to take action towards a culturally safe community housing sector that is inclusive of all.

We are developing a RAP to define actionable steps towards reconciliation in our business and sphere of influence. Through the development of our RAP, we want to build and strengthen relationships with First Nations peoples, organisations and communities and to embed the principles of reconciliation, cultural safety and self-determination within our organisation and our service provision. HousingFirst recognises that reconciliation is an ongoing process, and we are developing a RAP as a part of our reconciliation journey to engage in the continuous improvement in our organisation.

**In order to achieve this goal and create an effective RAP, HousingFirst's approach to implementing our RAP is guided by the following principles:**

- **Implementing changes across all streams of our organisation:**

We believe that there are actions to be taken to further reconciliation across our operational model, from hiring staff to acquiring properties, to designing and tenanting new developments. By ensuring each of these areas of the organisation is considered, we aim to implement a holistic and organisation-wide approach to our RAP.

- **Focus on continuous improvement:**

We want our RAP and its implementation to be authentic, acknowledging that reconciliation is a continuous journey, and we will never have a fixed solution or action to take to achieve reconciliation. Our approach must be dynamic and will focus on continuous improvement across our organisation and within our sphere of influence.

- **Implementing changes that are embedded within the organisation:**

By creating changes through policies and procedures and focusing on whole-of-organisation engagement, we will ensure that these changes are embedded into the fabric of the organisation.

- **Acknowledging and respecting peoples' differences:**

Finally, we acknowledge that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to cultural safety or to reconciliation. Throughout the implementation of our RAP, we will be respectful of peoples' identities and their differences, acknowledging the importance of taking an intersectional approach. We want to implement a RAP that is culturally safe for all First Nations peoples – embracing of their diversity through gender identities, sexual orientation, ability, or the way in which they connect with their First Nations identity, including those on Country and those finding their way home.

Our reconciliation journey to date has focused on building partnerships (an overview of which is in the next section), internal education and awareness raising. We have undertaken Cultural Awareness training for all staff members and celebrate and share information with staff about National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC week. Working in partnership with First Nations peoples is a vital component of reconciliation, and we have worked closely with external First Nations advisors to guide this RAP and our Vision for Reconciliation.

The development of this RAP has been guided by our RAP Working Group, consisting of HousingFirst staff and First Nations advisors, which meets quarterly. Currently three members of our RAP Working Group identify as First Nations people. The Working Group is governed by a Terms of Reference which sets out the roles, responsibilities, and requirements for the group, as well as its guiding principles.



# Our partnerships/current activities

## Partnerships

HousingFirst has a number of community partnerships with First Nations organisations, who we work with to provide culturally appropriate and supportive services to our residents. Our current community partnerships include:

**Ngwala Willumbong:** a dedicated Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) which provides specialist alcohol and drug rehabilitation and outreach services. HousingFirst has had a referral relationship with Ngwala for several years, and our allocations team work closely with the Ngwala team to help find suitable and supported long-term accommodation for clients.

**Aboriginal Housing Victoria:** HousingFirst has developed a collaborative relationship with Aboriginal Housing Victoria (AHV), working in partnership to support AHV in housing First Nations peoples. HousingFirst is providing AHV with properties in our portfolio to use when transitioning residents into new housing and is working on further ways we can work together to provide culturally sensitive housing to First Nations peoples.

**Wayapa Wuurrk:** Wayapa is an earth connection practice based on ancient Indigenous wisdom, adding “Earth” to the concept of Mind Body Spirit Wellbeing. HousingFirst has engaged Wayapa Wuurrk to provide wellness sessions for both staff and residents.

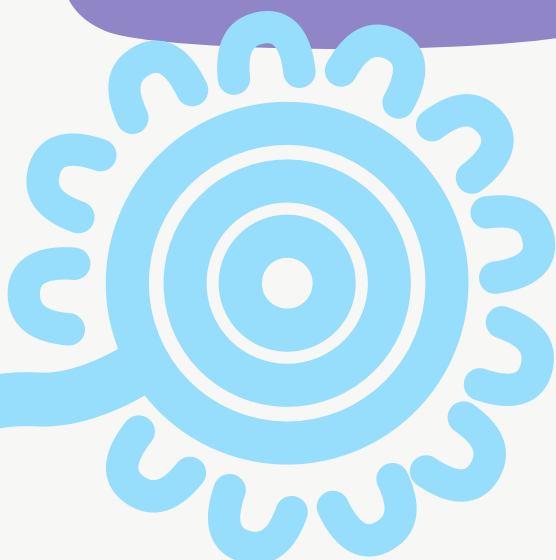
## Current activities

In the development of our RAP, HousingFirst organised a number of forums to hear from our resident community and get their input to shape our Vision for Reconciliation and our ongoing reconciliation activities. Our service provision to residents is our core business, and we wanted to engage with our residents genuinely and early in this process to ensure we work together towards the best outcomes.

To obtain this feedback, HousingFirst contacted all residents and worked with individuals to get their input in whatever way they were most comfortable. This included group workshops, surveys and emails, and residents had the choice to respond anonymously. Our focus was on ensuring this was done in an appropriate and sensitive manner, and we noted the importance of taking our time to do it correctly. The sessions we had with residents and feedback in other forms have informed our Vision for Reconciliation and our RAP, and we will continue to work with our residents as we continue on our reconciliation journey.

Internal activities and initiatives regarding reconciliation at HousingFirst have been primarily focused on education and awareness raising. In 2021, all staff attended a Cultural Awareness training run by VACSAL, and each year during National Reconciliation Week promotional materials are shared with staff and included in email banners. During NAIDOC week, HousingFirst usually organises an event - in 2022, we held a NAIDOC week lunch for staff catered by First Nations owned business Mabu Mabu, as well as a First Nations resident-led NAIDOC week cultural lunch.

We have also undertaken an initial review of our suppliers to determine where we can prioritise First Nations suppliers in our organisation. This review led to the engagement of several First Nations suppliers, and we hope to expand on our engagement of First Nations suppliers in the implementation of our RAP.

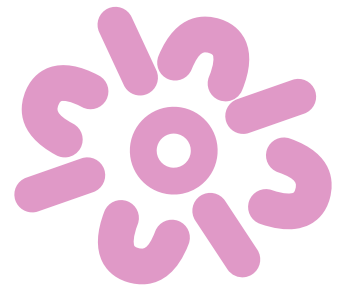


Images: Residents of our Cornelia Program participating in a wellness session run by Wayapa Wuurrk, 2022.





# Relationships



Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1. <b>Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify First Nations stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.</li> </ul>	November 2023	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations.</li> </ul>	December 2023	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore ways to build on existing relationships with First Nations stakeholders.</li> </ul>	April 2024	RAP Sponsor
2. <b>Build and strengthen relationships with our First Nations residents.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and hold workshops with current First Nations residents to build understanding of the housing and support needs of our First Nations residents.</li> </ul>	March 2024	Community development Co-ordinator
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the accuracy, consistency and appropriateness of how data is collected on First Nations residents.</li> </ul>	August 2024	Chief Resident Services Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine how to improve the accuracy, consistency and cultural sensitivity of how data is collected on First Nations residents and implement new processes.</li> </ul>	December 2024	Chief Resident Services Officer
3. <b>Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff and Board.</li> </ul>	May 2024	Marketing & Communications Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.</li> </ul>	27 May - 3 June 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage and support staff, senior leaders and Board to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.</li> </ul>	27 May - 3 June 2024	RAP Sponsor
4. <b>Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff and Board.</li> </ul>	August 2023	RAP Sponsor
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.</li> </ul>	October 2023	RAP Deputy Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.</li> </ul>	November 2023	RAP Deputy Chair
5. <b>Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.</li> </ul>	January 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.</li> </ul>	May 2024	Chief People Officer



# Respect

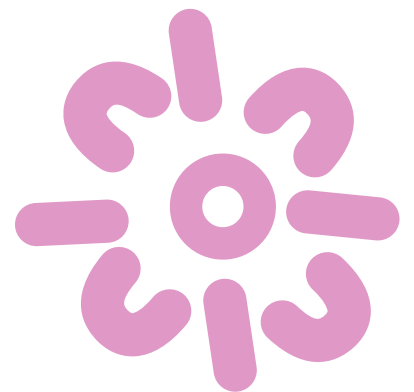
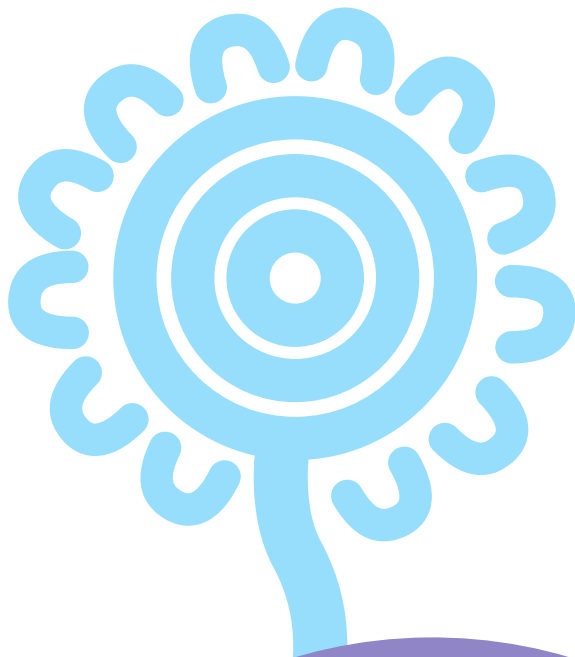
Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
6. Increase understanding, value and recognition of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledges and rights within our organisation.</li> </ul>	August 2023	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.</li> </ul>	September 2023	Chief People Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on the review include cultural learning in training plans for all employees which meets the cultural learning needs within the organisation.</li> </ul>	February 2024	Chief People Officer
7. Demonstrate respect to First Nations peoples by observing cultural protocols.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.</li> </ul>	September 2023	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase staff and Board's understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.</li> </ul>	October 2023	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase staff and Board's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.</li> </ul>	February 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a framework of standards to be followed across the organisation in regards to observing cultural protocols, guided by First Nations peoples and the Traditional Owners whose land we operate on.</li> <li>This could include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural protocols to be observed at different types of HousingFirst events</li> <li>Recognition of Traditional Owners of land for all HousingFirst sites</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>This framework should be shared with HousingFirst's Board and referenced in staff induction when developed.</p>	March 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop cultural guidelines to be followed across the organisation in regards to observing cultural protocols in printed and online materials, guided by First Nations peoples and the Traditional Owners whose land we operate on.</li> <li>This could include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of Traditional Owners of land for all HousingFirst sites</li> <li>Recognition of Traditional Owners of land for all HousingFirst marketing collateral and communications</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>These guidelines will form part of the HousingFirst brand guidelines.</p>	March 2024	RAP Chair





## Respect (continued)

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
8. <b>Build respect for First Nations cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff and Board about the meaning of NAIDOC Week.</li></ul>	June, annually	Marketing & Communications Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce our staff and Board to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area.</li></ul>	June, annually	RAP Deputy Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.</li></ul>	First week in July, annually	RAP Chair

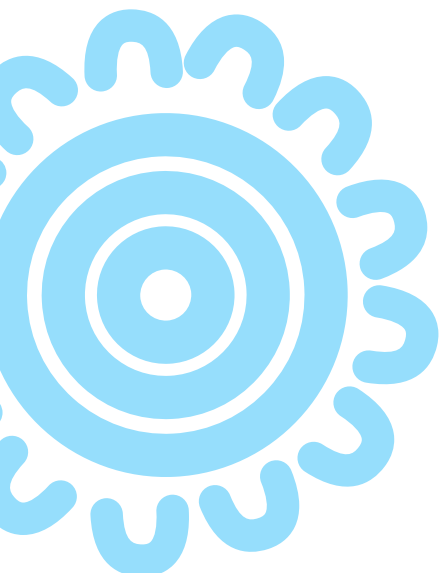






# Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>9. Improve employment outcomes by increasing First Nations recruitment, retention and professional development.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build understanding of current First Nations staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.</li></ul>	August 2024	Chief People Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a business case for First Nations employment within our organisation.</li></ul>	August 2024	RAP Chair
<b>10. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a business case for procurement from First Nations owned businesses.</li></ul>	March 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review current suppliers across all business areas and identify:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Existing relationships with First Nations suppliers which can be strengthened</li><li>• Opportunities to investigate new First Nations suppliers</li></ul></li></ul>	April 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigate Supply Nation membership.</li></ul>	April 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore implementing aspects of decolonising architecture and design in HousingFirst's Design Guidelines, which sets out guides for our development approach and all aspects of design. This could include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scoping First Nations consultation in the review and update of HousingFirst's Design Guidelines</li><li>• Research best practice and principles for decolonising architecture and design</li></ul></li></ul>	September 2024	Chief Commercial Officer





# Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
11. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain quarterly RWG meetings to govern the implementation of our RAP and track progress against deliverables.</li> </ul>	July, October 2023 January, April, July, October 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and update the Terms of Reference for the RWG.</li> </ul>	June 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain First Nations representation on the RWG.</li> </ul>	June 2024	RAP Chair
12. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define resource needs for RAP implementation.</li> </ul>	July 2023	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.</li> </ul>	July 2023	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.</li> </ul>	February 2024	RAP Sponsor
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain appointment of a senior leader to champion our RAP internally.</li> </ul>	June 2024	CEO
13. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence.</li> </ul>	June, annually	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire.</li> </ul>	1 August, annually	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.</li> </ul>	30 September, annually	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include updates on RAP actions and deliverables as a standing agenda item at the HousingFirst leadership meeting.</li> </ul>	July 2023	RAP Sponsor
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide report on updates from RAP Working Group meetings and progress against deliverables to the HousingFirst leadership team and Board.</li> </ul>	August, November 2023 February, May, August, November 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write public report capturing progress against RAP deliverables, to be published in the HousingFirst Annual Report.</li> </ul>	June 2024	RAP Chair
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.</li> </ul>	August 2024	RAP Chair



## Contact

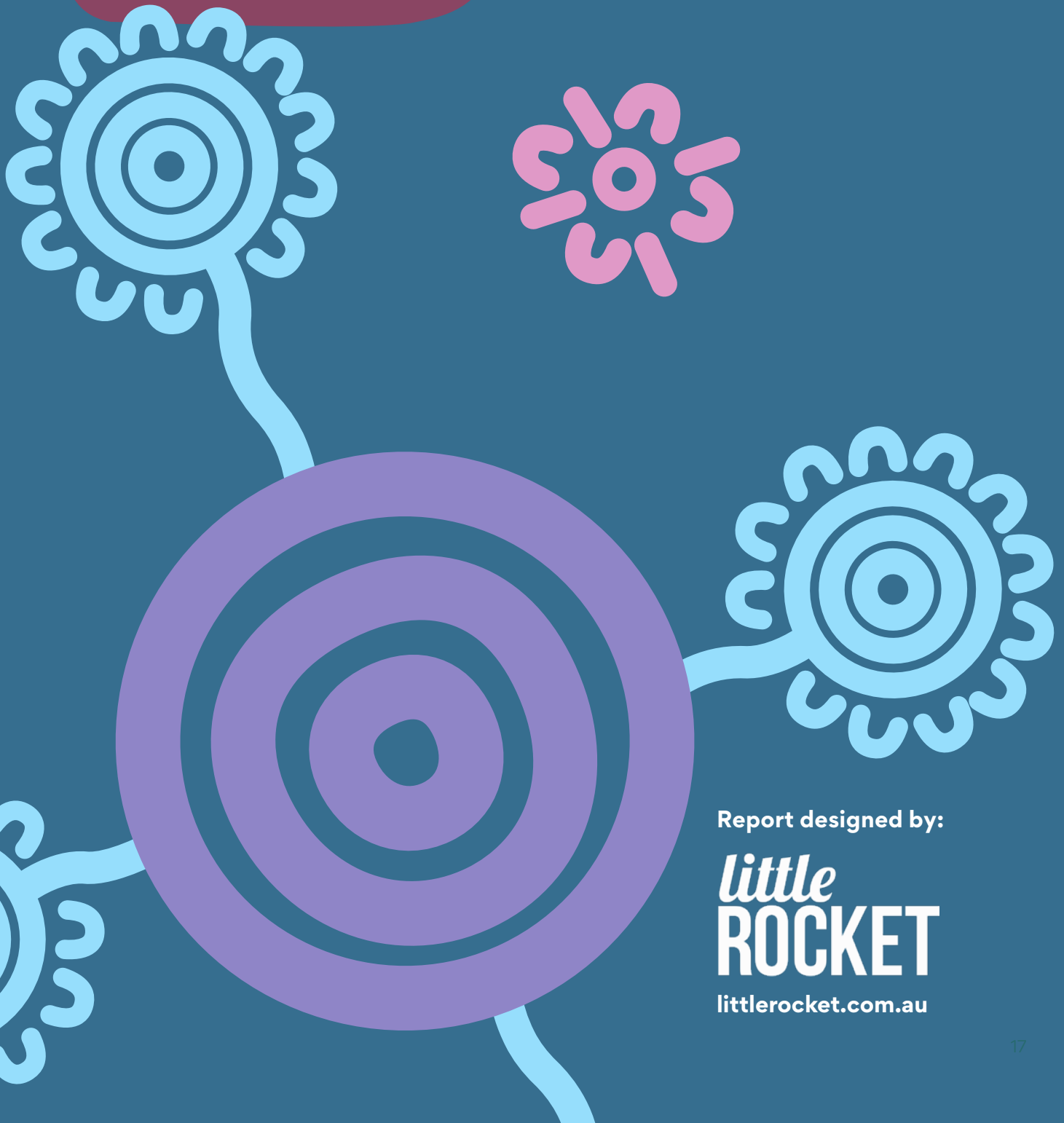
*(for public enquiries about our RAP)*

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**HousingFirst** 