

# Sharing a vision for our healthy futures



*QATSIHWEPAC Chair  
Victor Jose*

Hello, I'm Victor Jose, I'm chair of QATSIHWEPAC and welcome to our first issue of 'QATSIHWEPAC News'.

'QATSIHWEPAC News' is part of our realising a dream. For the 20-odd years I've been around people have always talked about having an indigenous training facility. QATSIHWEPAC is part of that dream, in fact the whole dream has born out of QATSIHWEPAC which, as you would know, is about health. Queensland is the only state

in which there is no indigenous VET level institution.

There is so much more to the dreams and aspirations of our community. There is health and that is obviously important to us. We believe, of course, that QATSIHWEPAC has contributed to that health dream but we need balance in our aims and objectives, what good is our health if we don't have economic status? What good is economic status and achievement if we don't have our health? If we don't have a vibrant, relevant and values-based - our values-based - social and cultural environment, what good are any of these other things?

What does it take to realise this dream? Staying focussed, keeping that vision and yet being able to have the flexibility to move with changes in community and government direction. Every time the government changes direction in indigenous affairs, our community is forced to as well. We need to prepare ourselves and assist our people to meet those changes and that requires a whole range of learning, skills development and a very clear vision of what and who we want to be.

What's made QATSIHWEPAC so strong is that it's always maintained and kept that vision. We want health, we want a healthy and wealthy community that is owned by the community, not government and not anyone else.

Here at QATSIHWEPAC we believe we're ready to take the next step and 'QATSIHWEPAC News' will be your way at community level of hearing what we're doing and coming along with us.

We all embarked on this journey 20 years ago, we've kept a vision of having our own institute and that is about to be realised.

This institute will be a testament to those who have previously led the way in health and indigenous affairs generally. People like Mick Miller, Clarrie Grogan, Shorti O'Neill, Margaret Valadian, Dulcie Watling, Pamela Mam ... and Eslyn Wargent, who we have featured in this, our first issue of 'QATSIHWEPAC News'.

We welcome you aboard and look forward to sharing this journey with you.

**Victor Jose**



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# Meet some of our future Health Workers



*Above: Cert IV students on a break, left to right is Christina Saunders, Eva Masso, Jamie Doyle, Elizabeth Bishop, Leah Pitt, Jeanette Grauner and Lolita Hunter. Right is Sharon Dockrill from Mossman who's studying for her Cert III in Indigenous Community Health and was doing placement at WuChopperen Health Service for two weeks.*



## Aunty Ez's 25 years of service

"Healthworkers are essential to Aboriginal health and that's why we developed the Aboriginal & Islander Health Workers' Education Program (AIHWEP), to empower indigenous people to become qualified healthworkers."

These are the words of WuChopperen Health Service Senior Healthworker Eslyn Wargent who has celebrated 25 years of service to the community in July this year.

As a nurse at Cairns Base Hospital Ms Wargent moved across to help with setting up WuChopperen after she was called in by Mick Miller in 1979.

Ms Wargent said WuChopperen Health Service is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation which provides culturally valid primary health care to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities in Cairns and surrounding districts.

She said it was incorporated 27 years ago in 1979 and officially launched on National Aboriginal Day, 10 July 1981. "After that Mick Miller asked for me to be seconded to TAFE where he recruited myself as Program Manager Liela Murison from Townsville, Bel Lui from Mackay, Elaine Burroughs who was teaching at TAFE at the time, Rowena Bulio who was just a caring person, Dr Sharon O'Rourke, Uncle Clarence Grogan, Shorti O'Neil and Thomas Prior from Palm Island," she said. "We started off with an 18 day Work Information Tour to Broome, Darwin, Katherine and then we came back to Cairns, collated what we'd learned and started shaping it into modules for AIHWEP. Once

the different modules were implemented I went back to WuChopperen. I've seen WuChopperen advance to what it is today and I've watched QATSIHWEPAC over the years, I've always had a soft spot for them." Ms Wargent said her career in health started young after she read a medical textbook while she was still in primary school.

"I went through part of grade 11 and then I was accepted into Townsville General because I wanted to be a nurse," she said.

"Healthwork is socially and culturally acceptable, accessible, affordable, preventative and holistic," she said.

"So strong was our commitment and dedication to see our dream a reality (in the beginning) that we approached other agencies such as the NSW Teachers' Federation, the Christian Medical Commission in Geneva and our North Queensland Land Council.

"I know Mum (Esme Hudson) and Aunty Rose (Richards) used to go around to the parks and pick up the parkies to make a quorum which gives you an idea of how dedicated these people were.

"From these humble beginnings I can proudly say WuChopperen today is a well-established organisation with the credit of being a finalist in this year's Reconciliation Australia and BHP Billiton's Indigenous Governance Awards.

"We've certainly all come a long way."



# A short history from Shorti



“Aboriginal people all over the world were very healthy once and we didn’t suffer from the diseases we suffer from today,” says QATSIHWE PAC Secretary to the Board and long-time political activist Shorti O’Neill.

“As Aboriginal people things like diabetes, obesity and heart diseases never affected us before because we had a wide variety of food source, we ate many different things on a daily basis, and we had plenty of exercise.

“Heart-related diseases and diabetes are both diet-related and both are from lack of exercise and that’s why today Aboriginal people have the worst health statistics in the world.

“We’re on a par with the worst third world countries and we have to do something about that.

“We cannot rely on governments in this country to sort out our health problems, we have to come to terms with it ourselves.

“We’ve always recognised that and it’s always been a part of our struggle along with the other struggles that we have.

“Back in the early 1980s Mick Miller and I saw that health workers from a community could work on the ground in their own community so they could help their own people by educating them to help bring about cures of the health problems our communities faced.

“We knew we must be training people from those communities because there’s no result unless we take control of health needs ourselves.

“1990 was our first graduation class.

“We had an agreement with TAFE because in those days there were no such things as Regional Training Organisations, and we managed this program ourselves.

“There’s a lot more work to do on the professional side especially if you look at it compared to nursing.

“Nurses are trained to put band aids on the sores, health workers are also trained to put band aids on the sores but on top of that they’re trained to overcome the health problem before you need the band aid in the first place.

“Hopefully some time in the future there won’t be the need for a band aid because we’ve overcome those health problems before they’ve reached that situation.

“We have always been about, delivering health and health education to indigenous communities and them

having a career so they could be paid appropriately for doing a job that needs to be done.

“Professional recognition is a struggle that health workers themselves must take on board and the more health workers we train who are out there delivering the stronger that will get.

“Aboriginal people didn’t just lie down and let those bastards take our country, we fought them every step of the way and in the 60s, 70s and 80s we became more politicised and more out in the open but a lot of the ground we gained in those days have been lost.

“If you don’t learn by your mistakes then you’re doomed to live them again.”



## Staff take Quality Control on board

“I’m Margaret Browne from the Department of Employment and Training in Brisbane. I work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Registered Training Organisations throughout Queensland. I’m here today to look at quality systems with the administration staff of QATSIHWE PAC. We’ve been focussing on some of the documents they’ve produced, looking at the quality of those and if they meet the Australian Quality Training Framework Guidelines. They’ve done a lot of work to get where they are today, there’s more to be done but I’m sure they can get there, they’re doing very well.”

And what did the staff say?!

“Both workshops we’ve had with Margaret have been very informative and have backed up what we already know needs to be done to have best practice and the quality we want for our students and the community.”



*Pictured (L-R): Lindsey Mallie, Toni-Anne Wade, Margaret Browne, Preben Nordbruc & Jenny Lister*

# QATSIHWEPAC BOARD MEMBERS & STAFF 2006

*Pictured L-R:  
Shorti O'Neill,  
Katrina Wilson,  
Steve Tait,  
Jenny Lister,  
Victor Jose,  
Pauline Seddon,  
Jeff Timor  
& Verna  
Singleton.*



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