

**Reception for the  
Western Australian Aboriginal Leadership Institute  
Celebration of 100 Graduates of Yorga Djenna Bidi**

**Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC  
Governor of Western Australia**

**Wednesday, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

I would like firstly to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

It's a pleasure to warmly welcome you all to Government House for this special event in celebration of a very significant milestone: more than 100 Graduates (113, to be exact) have completed the Yorga Djenna Bidi Aboriginal Women's Leadership program.

Since its inception in 2015, seven cohorts of Aboriginal women have completed this 5 month long leadership initiative.

Tonight we welcome old friends to the House. Yorga Djenna Bidi's genesis sprang from within these walls through the endeavour of my predecessor Hon Kerry Sanderson, Dr Sue Van Leeuwen (who was CEO of Leadership WA at that time), Robyn Smith-Walley, and Rishelle Hume. These women had a shared dream to build a community of strong, skilled Aboriginal women leaders, and even more importantly, they had the tenacity to bring this vision to life.

From the success of Yorga Djenna Bidi, the Western Australian Aboriginal Leadership Institute (WAALI) was officially launched here at the House by Kerry Sanderson in February 2018, and now delivers a wider suite of leadership development programs tailored specifically for the needs of Aboriginal people.

Tonight, I pay special acknowledgement to the Elders, who support, mentor and guide Yorga Djenna Bidi participants. Thank you for your efforts, which are a unique and critical component to each participants' success and the success of the program.

Yorga Djenna Bidi (which is Noongar for: *women walking forward together*) is the only leadership initiative that brings Aboriginal women together across different backgrounds, ages, occupations, identities, experiences, and education. This diversity allows participants to learn from each other, as well as from key speakers and facilitators.

Participant feedback shows that younger members are able to explore cultural identity issues with more mature participants who, in turn, learn more about issues faced by younger Aboriginal women.

Cultural content and context is interwoven through the program design and delivery, involving 4 modules of leadership development over a five month period.

Other leadership development approaches have commonly sponsored Aboriginal people to attend mainstream leadership programs, with little to no additional support or recognition of the challenges they may face in integrating their learnings into their own reality.

This can create challenges for participants, including reduced participation, isolation, disenfranchisement, and failure to graduate.

Additionally, these approaches often spotlight existing leaders while neglecting younger, emerging and aspiring leaders. In the Aboriginal context, supporting younger leaders is particularly important as the Aboriginal population is youthful, with a median age of 23 years in Western Australia (compared to 36.3 years for non-Aboriginal Western Australians).

Research has also shown that having significant numbers of Aboriginal women in leadership positions encourages and sustains other women, and thus, our communities.

Turning to the 70-odd graduates here tonight, I congratulate you all on your successful completion of the program, whether in recent months or a few years ago. Your experience and learnings will continue to build your confidence and capacity to lead, develop your careers and networks, and connect with culture and your stories. The positive and ongoing impacts on your families, your communities, and our State, will be immense.

Yorga Djenna Bidi is now recognised by many Government Agencies, Corporates, and not for profit entities, as a highly valued leadership program for their employees. Many are actively supporting staff from across WA to apply and participate.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing and generous support of Chevron Australia: a major partner of the program. Thank you for recognising the importance of this initiative.

We are privileged to share this land with the oldest continuous civilisation on earth. The happiness and dignity of Aboriginal people needs to be at the forefront of our thinking. Initiatives which seek to build Aboriginal people's capacity to lead and to participate in decision making are incredibly important for our nation.

With WAALI leading the charge, I'm confident that the vision of a state-wide network of influential and empowered Aboriginal leaders working in partnership with non-Aboriginal leaders on meaningful initiatives is firmly in train.

I congratulate the graduates, Elders, WAALI leaders, staff, supporters and all involved, on this outstanding achievement to date. As your proud Patron, I will watch WAALI's unfolding story of success with keen interest.

I now invite WAALI Co-Chairs Rishelle Hume and Robyn Smith-Walley, to say a few words...