

Overcoming adversity against the odds

Erma Ranieri

Associate Diploma in Business (Personnel/Industrial Relations)

South Australia's Commissioner for Public Sector Employment

Be tenacious. Be bold. Know your purpose.

The old saying that 'pressure makes diamonds' rings true for Erma Ranieri.

There is much to be said about a young migrant woman who grew up in Adelaide's western suburbs who became the 2014 Telstra South Australian Business Woman of the Year and is South Australia's Commissioner for Public Sector Employment.

Erma is known for her dynamic, adaptive and values-based leadership, which she embeds in all facets of her role as Commissioner. As Erma reflects, this approach helps her fulfil her vision to build a modern, inclusive world-leading public sector.



"I've always known I wanted to be in a position where I could be bold, make real change and contribute to make things better," Erma said.

"Anyone who knows me knows I am driven by purpose. When you are in touch with your purpose, what is important to you and your instincts, you design your life according to your priorities and you are willing to make sacrifices and trade-offs.

"And, in my experience, you will have less regrets."

Erma's story is one of overcoming adversity against the odds— speaking English as a second language, negotiating male-dominated environments, working part-time and caring for a family member with a disability are just some of the challenges she has overcome to achieve her personal and professional aspirations.

Life wasn't always easy and disadvantage was commonplace. But, it always lifted Erma's spirit to see people help her family when they needed it most. As Erma explains, it was these experiences that cemented her commitment to be a connected and adaptive leader – a leader that builds resilience, capability and the capacity of peers and colleagues.

"My experiences growing up often made me feel like we weren't on an equal footing with other people.

"The acts of kindness from others to my family still motivate me to make a difference. My experiences taught me a lot about compassion and how to build resilience.

"As Commissioner and leading the Office for the Public Sector, I draw on these experiences to guide me to be an adaptive and connected leader - a leader that fosters inclusivity, innovation and purpose. As a steward of the public sector, it is my priority to ensure our workforce reflects the diverse community we serve."

As Erma recounts, her work ethic was established early. At just 12 years old she was running the local deli on Saturdays. Growing up, she wanted to be a psychologist and earned a place at university. Her parents, however, had a different view.

"My parents were very traditional and weren't supportive of me continuing my education. So I joined the 'dole queue' until I won a job with the Registrar of Motor Vehicles filing registration cards for my first boss, Rod Frisby."

Erma found a mentor in Rod, and with his support she enrolled at the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) (now part of UniSA) to study Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations.

"I have always had a keen interest in transformational change, adaptive leadership and human behaviour.

"My study gave me a taste of that with the foundational pieces in industrial relations, policies and reforms. Back then, HR management was considered 'back room', but it is now well and truly the right hand for any chief executive.

"I studied part-time and worked full-time, and anything I learned was practical and translated into my professional life. It was excellent grounding for the career that lay ahead of me."

It was the mentorship and guidance Erma received over the years that motivated her to establish her mentoring program for 11 aspiring female public sector leaders, which was launched on International Women's Day in 2017.

"I know the value of a great mentor, and how it has helped me build personal resilience.

"I wanted to give back, and share my experiences to help build other women's skills and confidence. This program is very personal, and personifies my mission to foster transformational change in other people's lives. Nearly a year on, I am proud of the program's impact and what we have achieved."

While becoming Commissioner was not planned, Erma says working in an administrative position in the then Commissioner's office when she was 23 years old, piqued her interest in the role. Recognising this role required rigour and enthusiasm, Erma worked tirelessly to climb the public sector ranks.

With her purpose, values and ethics as her foundation, she embraced innovation, courage and tenacity to drive sector-wide reform. This led Erma, for example, to pioneer job-sharing at the executive level as a general manager at the Department of Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA).

"At the time, many women 'levelled-down' or left when they started a family, but I refused to give up. At the time, a job-share at that level was unheard of. It took tenacity, but we made it work."

This courage paved the way for other women, and as Commissioner, she has helped implement a whole-of-government Gender Equality in Leadership strategy, to ensure more women are represented in leadership roles.

2014 saw Erma achieve two significant milestones: she was appointed Commissioner and was named the 2014 Telstra South Australian Business Woman of the Year, where she was recognised for driving change and reforms to make the South Australian public sector more efficient, flexible and responsive to change.

"Being awarded Telstra Business Woman of the Year was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

"I am passionate about tapping into what motivates people and how people can reconcile both work and life. This award helped open the door to many more opportunities to challenge work place 'norms' that enforce conformity and impact employee wellbeing.

"It put the spotlight on these issues and I hope it helped many people—both men and women—think differently about work and what can be achieved."

As Commissioner, Erma has continued her commitment to sector-wide reform, with the roll out of initiatives that foster a 'One Government' approach.

"To deliver a world-leading public sector we need to embrace different ways of thinking to deliver public value.

"In both my office and in the public sector, I see purpose, values and behaviours as driving our performance, building our capacity and our capability to deliver for our community.

"That's why my team advocates innovation, flexibility and inclusion at a whole-of-government level. These are grounded firmly in the public sector values, which are: Service, Professionalism, Trust, Respect, Collaboration & Engagement, Honesty & Integrity, Courage & Tenacity.

"Importantly, all agencies form 'One Government'. That's why we need connected leadership to ensure we are inclusive and we collaborate to achieve great results for our sector and our State."

This sector-wide approach is evident in many initiatives Erma and her office oversee, which can be viewed [here](#)

"Our initiatives are bold, but rightly so.

"Our purpose - what we do and why we do it - motivates me every day."

For more information about the Office for the Public Sector visit www.publicsector.sa.gov.au



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Easing the painful experience of oesophageal cancers

Professor Sanjay Garg

Director, **Centre for Pharmaceutical Innovation and Development (CPID)**
University of South Australia

Professor Sanjay Garg and his team in the Centre for Pharmaceutical Innovation and Development (CPID) are developing new drug delivery technologies to improve the quality of life of terminally ill oesophageal cancer patients.

Oesophageal cancer has proven to be one of the more difficult cancers to treat successfully, largely due to the inability to discover the disease in its early stages. Many patients do not seek medical help until the cancer has progressed to a highly aggressive stage and the five year survival rate can be as low as 15-20%.

Typical oesophageal cancer treatment includes surgical removal of the tumour followed by chemotherapy and sometimes radiotherapy. However, in the majority of cases, these patients are palliative so the treatment options are aimed at maximising comfort for the months or years left.

As it is difficult to completely remove all of the cells of these aggressive cancers during surgery, an oesophageal stent is used to ensure the tube, which runs from the mouth to the stomach, stays open if the tumour regrows.

“A collaborating clinician recently said to me that one of our biggest blessings that we don’t realise until it is taken away is our ability to enjoy eating and drinking normally. This treatment is not designed to be a cure, but to make patients more comfortable in their final days so they can continue to eat and drink normally,” said Professor Garg.

“We have devised a system that we hope will optimise treatment. By coating the stent with a special polymeric film that can slowly release the anticancer drug locally, we expect this will be the best opportunity to target any left-over cancer cells and stop the tumour from regrowing and causing discomfort.”

Professor Garg’s team are now investigating specific blends of polymeric compounds as a potential coating for the stents. The polymer film will be loaded with the cancer drug and sprayed onto the stents in such a way that as they gradually biodegrade harmlessly within the oesophagus, the drug can be slowly released over a period of up to 90 days.

“We still have a lot of work to do as this is the first research to address this specific issue. We need to analyse what the best dose and treatment is, the very best polymer compound, and what drug release duration would be best – for example a quick release of 30 days or a slow controlled one of 90 days.”

Localising treatment for cancers is an important area of work.

“We need to find ways to make sure that anticancer drugs are not distributed throughout the body but targeted specifically to the areas where the cancer cells reside in order to reduce side effects from treatment.

“We also need to make sure that the quality of life of patients is maintained as much as possible. This is one of the biggest challenges for the scientific community in regards to current treatments.”

To support cancer research at UniSA please visit: <https://donate.unisa.edu.au/donate-to-cancer-research>



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Taking the leap into your dream job

Lizzi Wigmore

Bachelor of Communications, Media and Culture
Marketing, Intrinsic
Founder, Cakelaide

Deciding to take the leap and embarking upon your true dream job can often be too daunting to initiate with all the 'what ifs' swimming around in our 2am sleepless minds. But to Lizzi Wigmore, leaving her stable corporate position and pursuing her true creative passion was a no-brainer.

Was it difficult to leave a long-term position at a stable company to pursue your true passion? What made you decide to finally 'take-the-leap'?

Funnily enough it wasn't a difficult decision, because I got to a point where I valued my happiness more than a stable corporate job. While I certainly pondered the decision, I knew in my heart that this new opportunity set my soul on fire, made me smile when thinking about it, and sparked a motivation that I hadn't felt for quite a while. It just felt right. I'm a big believer in following your intuition, and my gut feeling was telling me to leap towards Intrinsic... so I leapt! If something feels that right, and that good, then just do it and see where it takes you.



What is it about this Intrinsic that you feel encapsulates "you"?

Intrinsic just feels like it's me to a T. It's all about inspirational quotes, beautifully designed products, and a rainbow of colour. Their aim is to spread joy, happiness and love in the world, and I just love everything about them! Their product, their inspiring words, their mission, the husband and wife founders... I love it all, and importantly, I believe in the brand.

One of my favourite quotes by Adele Basheer - Intrinsic founder and inspiring wordsmith - is "The universe works in mysterious ways, trust that everything happens at the right time for the right reason." This message has guided me through much of my life, and so I think that I was ready and it was the right time to 'come home' to Intrinsic after so many years, to take their marketing and communications to a new level. I had dabbled in a few different jobs, developed a variety of skillsets, built my experience, developed myself both professionally and personally, and reached a point of clarity of what I wanted from my future career.

You said, "If you love something, you'll never work a day in your life." What does this mean to you?

Loving what you do means waking up excited to go to work, smiling as you go about your day, getting enjoyment out of most tasks, feeling your face light up as you tell people about it, thinking up ideas outside of work time, and genuinely having fun and feeling happy at your workplace.

In your opinion, what are the essential ingredients required to truly love your job?

The key is to know yourself and focus on your likes, passions and desires. Focus on what draws you in and what you get enjoyment from. It can be little things like hobbies, weekend pursuits, or specific tasks in your current job. Whatever makes you smile and ignites a spark in you, focus on that! That is the feeling you want to nurture, that is the feeling you want to turn into a job and a career. Everyone has something that makes them spark, so find that something, and figure out how you can turn it into your career. If you can take what you already love and turn it into a job, then you will wake up every morning excited and motivated for the day ahead. It's just about finding that spark that lights you up.



What advice do you have for others about pursuing their passion in their own careers, when employment can be unstable in our current environment?

Obviously we need to work to pay our bills - everyone does. But even if you're in a job that isn't truly aligned with you, try to find the little things in that role that make your soul shine. Find the parts of that role that you enjoy and that make you smile, however small they are. And focus on them. Then aim to increase those 'happy parts' in your next role. Whether it's gaining experience in a certain area, going back to study, or starting your own business. Just figure out what are your happy parts, and plan to have more of them in your next role. Onwards and upwards!

What advice do you have for recent graduates who are looking for opportunities in their field of study?

I would highly recommend utilising your uni degree for networking and work experience opportunities. I undertook two internships while at UniSA and both resulted in paid work, boosted my resume, and gave me fantastic contacts. I even got a house sitting gig for the owner of the PR firm where I did one internship! And the Marketing Manager at the other internship became a close friend and mentor, and even offered me a job upon my return to Adelaide from overseas. Contacts are key in Adelaide - it's all about the relationships.

Internships and work experience give you a taste of what the industry is like, and for me, this left me wanting more and knowing that I had studied the right field.

You have also started a beautiful cake decorating business. How you become involved in this?

This passion and skill kind of came out of nowhere! I have always been a sweet tooth and loved desserts, but never once thought it would turn into a cake making business! It started just over a year ago when I made my sister's 30th birthday cake. It wasn't your average cake, as I had seen a bunch of cake inspo on Pinterest, and I wanted to try something a bit more special. I received so much beautiful feedback and people saying I had a real talent for it, so I decided to dabble my hand in cake making and see where it went.

I've always been creative, and so cake decorating is a fun way of tapping into my creativity to come up with unique cake creations. I love everything from researching different cake styles, designing how my cake will look, trying new techniques, and seeing the end result bring a smile to my customer's face. My cake business Cakelaide is still in its early stages, but it's become a passion that I'm exploring to see where it takes me!

What are your long-term goals?

I love the marketing, PR and communications industry, even more so now that I can focus on a brand that I truly love. While my career has focused in digital marketing so far, I'd be keen to explore my creative side at some point, maybe in graphic design or photography. Whatever the case and whatever I end up doing, I just want to enjoy my work and ensure it brings a smile to my face. So that is what I'll pursue more than anything - that feeling of joy and happiness in loving what you're doing. Because as the saying goes, "if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life!"

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Happy Lunar New Year! Gong Xi Fa Cai!

Lunar New Year, also known as Chinese New Year or the Spring Festival, is one of the most celebrated events across the globe. It's a time spent with family and friends, feasting on foods with symbolic meanings, paying respect to elders, gift-giving and good wishes.

This year, in 2018, it is the Year of the Dog. According to Asian astrology, anyone born in an Earth Dog year will be communicative, serious, and responsible in the workplace.

UniSA's Singapore Alumni Chapter President, Lawrence Lim, and Malaysia Alumni Chapter President, Colin Song, share how they celebrate the festive occasion as well as their plans to welcome the Year of the Dog.

Colin Song, President, Malaysia Alumni Chapter

"We celebrate the Lunar New Year or Spring Festival traditionally by having family reunion dinner on New Year's Eve. Our homes are decorated with auspicious red decorations, with 'fortune', 'wealth', 'good luck' and 'peace' written in calligraphy. One of the main activities is lighting firecrackers and red-packets with cash are given to family and friends, especially children.

"The favourite activity for all of us is enjoying meals and good food with family, relatives and friends over the 15 days of celebration. One special custom is to have many 'Yee Sang' salads, which has the meaning of 'abundance of progress and growth'.

"We plan to welcome the Year of the Dog with well wishes to our family, friends and alumni, wishing everyone a Prosperous and Healthy Year of Dog."



Lawrence Lim, President, Singapore Alumni Chapter

"Normally I will celebrate the Lunar New Year by cleaning the house and I put up red decorations, appease the kitchen god, dress up neatly for the occasion, visit a temple to get well wishes, honour the ancestors, set off firecrackers, and give gifts of money in red envelopes to the younger generation.

"My favourite part is to keep an eye out for the special dances. Besides firecrackers, food, activities, and music, Lunar New Year parades are a rare opportunity to watch costumed dragon dancers and lion dancers. The dragon dancers skillfully synchronize their dancing in one line, holding poles supporting a long, vibrant dragon. Two lion dancers share a single costume depicting a large, stylized lion. The dance often includes comic elements, such as a silly monk who helps the lion track down a lettuce. Both dances are accompanied by traditional drumming.



This year we have organized a Lo Hei Dinner together with the Committee of the UniSA Singapore Alumni. The objective of this gathering is to unite the team and foster a closer relationship among members to prepare for bigger challenges in the coming months. We will visit the China Town in Singapore and soak ourselves in the celebrative atmosphere in order to welcome the Year of Dog."

Which Chinese Zodiac animal am I?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rat: 2008, 1996, 1984, 1972, 1960Ox: 2009, 1997, 1985, 1973, 1961Tiger: 2010, 1998, 1986, 1974, 1962Rabbit: 2011, 1999, 1987, 1975, 1963Dragon: 2012, 2000, 1988, 1976, 1964Snake: 2013, 2001, 1989, 1977, 1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Horse: 2014, 2002, 1990, 1978, 1966Goat: 2015, 2003, 1991, 1979, 1967Monkey: 2016, 2004, 1992, 1980, 1968Rooster: 2017, 2005, 1993, 1981, 1969Dog: 2006, 1994, 1982, 1970, 1958Pig: 2007, 1995, 1983, 1971, 1959

We wish you a happy Lunar New Year and hope the Year of the Dog is prosperous and comes with good fortune. May you enjoy this time with your family and friends.

Happy Lunar New Year! Gong Xi Fa Cai!



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Caffeine and kids: the no-go combo

Dr Millie Watson, Research Assistant School of Health Sciences

Research Assistant School of Health Sciences

University of South Australia researchers are calling for parents and clinicians to take stock of children's diets following new research that shows a causal relationship between primary-aged children's caffeine intake, poor sleep and difficult daytime behaviour.

The study, published in the Journal of Clinic Sleep Medicine, examined the relationship between caffeine consumption, sleep, and daytime behaviour in Australian children aged 8-12 years, seeking to determine the average caffeine intake, the source of caffeine consumption, and the impact it had on children throughout the day.

Led by UniSA's [Dr Millie Watson](#), the research found 87 per cent of Australian primary-aged children had consumed caffeine throughout their weekly diets.



"Caffeine is a known stimulant that increases alertness, which is great for adults looking to manage drowsiness, but for children, it presents a plethora of problems," Dr Watson says.

"Unlike adults, children are far less able to handle caffeine in their systems.

"When caffeine is included in children's diets, their sleep quality and quantity suffers, and as a result, so does their behaviour the following day.

"The challenge for parents is to take note of which foods and drinks might contain caffeine, and to limit or avoid these altogether."

Examining the responses of 309 Australian children, the study found children's caffeine consumption ranged from 0-151 milligrams per day, with the average daily intake between 10.2 + 17.4 milligrams—the equivalent of a 50 gram solid milk chocolate bar or 30 milliliters of Red Bull.

"The largest contributor to children's caffeine consumption is tea and coffee, making up 41 per cent of children's total caffeine intake," Dr Watson says.

"This is closely followed by soft drinks, which contribute 40 per cent of caffeine intake, chocolate food and drinks—the most commonly consumed caffeine source, but accounting for only 13 per cent of caffeine—and finally, energy drinks comprising six per cent.

"While these amounts of caffeine are within the suggested international guidelines, and are small by adult standards, even modest amounts of caffeine can affect children's sleep, academic performance and well-being," Dr Watson says.

The study also found that children who consumed significantly more caffeine, slept far fewer hours (7-8 hours per night) than those who had consumed less caffeine (sleeping 9-11 hours per night).

"When children suffer from broken or reduced sleep, it increases their propensity for internalising behaviours, such as anxiety, depression and social withdrawal," Dr Watson says.

"We're not saying caffeine alone is responsible for poor sleep and challenging behaviours in children, but it is a proven key contributor.

"So, before parents and clinicians turn to medications to calm or control children's sleep or behaviours, perhaps the first step is to take check of their caffeine intake – it may just be the anomaly you're looking for."



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Increasing employment for Aboriginal people

Deanne Hanchant-Nichols

Associate Diploma of Arts (Aboriginal Studies)

Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal Studies)

**Consultant: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Development
University of South Australia**

Deanne Hanchant-Nichols is determined to increase employment for Aboriginal people. Her driver for change is her intention to see real transformation and growth within Aboriginal communities, which is why she is developing such effective strategies that embrace culture and history.

Deanne was recently recognised for her outstanding work in the community and equal contribution to UniSA, receiving one of the Gladys Elphick Awards- the Shirley Peisley- which is awarded to an Aboriginal woman leading positive change for Aboriginal people in the workplace.

"I'm not really big on awards, but I am really honoured to have won the Shirley Peisley Award, knowing what it stands for," says Deanne.

"It's really nice to be recognised for all of my work in the community, but I certainly didn't expect to win it! I was sure another nominee had, so it was such a wonderful surprise."

Deanne is a TanganeKald/Barkindji Aboriginal woman who has worked in various capacities over the years, primarily in education, but also as General Manager at the Old Adelaide Gaol – with many ghost stories to tell – and now enjoys the diversity of her role as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Development Consultant for UniSA, where she is integral in developing the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy](#).

UniSA is committed to increasing Aboriginal employment, by utilising talented staff such as Deanne, who are in touch with the complexities and needs of Aboriginal people.

"In my role, the reality is that there are significantly low numbers of Aboriginal people in employment, even within UniSA I am one of 1.3%."

"I have a real challenge on my hands to reach the new national target of 3% as per Federal legislation, but I am on a mission to do so".

Her current position incorporates cultural safety and awareness, strategies to increase employment, but also broadens to Aboriginal media and arts projects such as the [Blue Wren](#) video series, produced in conjunction with the School of Engineering. As Consultant, she was also engaged in relation to the Acknowledgement of Country which will take pride and place in [Pridham Hall](#), anticipated to open early 2018.

"One of the concepts created to increase Aboriginal employment was an Aboriginal exemption, permitting applications for previously 'internal only' positions, encouraging access to a wider variety of jobs.

"Another being the '[Mark your Identity](#)' campaign, increasing Aboriginal visibility on paper, assisting with targeting necessary initiatives and improving future programs and policies.

"However more work needs to be done to achieve success in employment application and interview processes. We want to implement a program which will allow the University to utilise the bank of people who have applied for different roles over the years, and create an annual day or series of 'CV, interview and cover letter' workshops, which will provide guidance on UniSA's preferred application style.

"Whilst the Strategy has been successful thus far in creating significant change within UniSA, there is still room for improvement."

Deanne has been working alongside Professor Peter Buckskin, Dean of Aboriginal Engagement and Strategic Projects on the proposed Yaitya Warpulai Tappa, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Plan for 2017-2019.

While Deanne is modest about her professional achievements and would rather focus on the overall positive change she has helped create within UniSA, she has in fact brought about noticeable advances in relation to cultural education and awareness.

"Getting so many people through cultural safety training, I have seen attitudes shift, people are thinking before they say and do things.

"Seeing the university mature in that sense has been amazing. I feel really proud.

"When I came to the university, even Reconciliation Week was not recognised and we pulled together something for every single campus - it was amazing."

Cultural awareness is a vital component of [UniSA's Reconciliation Action Plan](#), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy as abovementioned, and the overall ambition to be 'university of choice' for Aboriginal people.

Cultural safety training at UniSA is predominantly introduced via workshops that not only raise awareness, but begin the process of developing a working understanding of Aboriginal Australia. This enables participants to engage in genuine cross-cultural communication and to identify strategies for working together across cultures.

"I believe that as awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture increases at UniSA, especially with regular cultural safety training in place, focus has been shifting to Aboriginal employment within the university."

After recently attending a forum in Sydney for university employment officers Deanne feels both hopeful and hesitant about the proposed new target.

"Aboriginal people are 1.67% of the population in South Australia, so this target is challenging to say the least.

"With limited numbers to begin with, and academic education out of reach for many Aboriginal people when we are still struggling to get our young people through high school –in parity with non-Aboriginal Australians, we really need to have strong strategies in place to entice Aboriginal people to study, to then retain students and to make them feel supported throughout. This will create word of mouth that University is a feasible option, an enjoyable and worthwhile experience."

UniSA and its antecedent institutions, have over four decades of [increasing inclusion of Aboriginal students](#), by creating an environment where they can learn and grow, and one which respects and learns from Aboriginal wisdoms, highlighting their commitment to being the 'university of choice' for Aboriginal people.

UniSA is conscious of the factors, identified by Universities Australia, that contribute to Aboriginal students' premature withdrawal, namely: financial pressures, insufficient academic support, as well as cultural or social alienation caused by the demands of study.

"This is important to UniSA that prides itself on overall [Aboriginal engagement](#), which in turn benefits both Aboriginal people and their opportunities, their respective communities, as well as society in general, as we become more united Australia.

"As discussed in [Dean Peter Buckskin's article](#), this ripple effect of higher education within Aboriginal communities will in time impact health and general wellbeing, and ultimately increase mortality rates. This is a significant reach stemming from engagement with higher education – provided retention rates continue to improve" says Deanne.

"I'm optimistic about success in increasing Aboriginal employment and moving forward in general with Aboriginal engagement."

Unlike Deanne's experiences with ghosts at the Adelaide Gaol, Aboriginal visibility in employment is ever increasing, as is society's understanding of the complexities of Aboriginal history and culture, thanks innovative thinkers such as Deanne.

*Throughout this article, the term "Aboriginal" refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, collectively.



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