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Why languages matter: Notre Dame celebrates NAIDOC Week

The importance, resilience, richness and preservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages – along with a performance by two of Australia’s top Aboriginal musicians – was a focus of NAIDOC Week celebrations at Notre Dame University’s Fremantle Campus on Friday 7 July 2017.

Reflecting the 2017 NAIDOC Week theme, ‘Our Languages Matter’, Notre Dame’s event for staff, students and members of the Fremantle community raised awareness about the need to sustain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages for future generations – so that the words, songs, stories and inter-generational knowledge about family, religion, food and geography are not lost forever.

During his keynote address, one of Australia’s leading Aboriginal singer/songwriters, Phillip Walley-Stack, illustrated how a close connection to his Nyungar language and culture shaped his passion for music. For the past 10 years, Mr Walley-Stack has shared his language and stories from ‘home’ with an international audience – including actress Sophia Loren, and Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh from The Eagles.

David Pigrim, a member of the famous Broome-based folk/rock band, The Pigrim Brothers, treated the audience to a special musical performance – singing about his experience of living in Western Australia’s Kimberley region.

Associate Professor Clive Walley, National Director of Indigenous Education, said NAIDOC Week gave the University community an opportunity to recognise the contributions Indigenous Australians have made to their country and for their people.

“This year’s theme ‘Our Languages Matter’ relates quite strongly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ identity and sense of belonging to their traditional areas across the continent,” Associate Professor Walley said.

“It is very important that the younger generation listen to the old people, about the stories told, which have been handed down through the generations. As someone said the other day, ‘why does our language matter?’ Because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples matter.”

Notre Dame Master’s student, Hayley Sherratt, said: “We were fortunate to listen to Phillip Walley-Stack’s story about how language influenced his life from a young age and hearing David Pigrim continue with a gentle and moving solo performance that had many languages within his song. It was a privilege to be part of a significant NAIDOC ceremony at Notre Dame,” she said.

Professor Selma Allix, Head of the Fremantle Campus, said language provided a sense of place, a sense of belonging, connections to country and waters and, above all, a sense of identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“Through learning more about languages, and how they connect people to Country and the Country to people, we not only celebrate the rich history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures but also preserve these languages for future generations,” Professor Allix said.



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Media Release



NAIDOC celebrations concluded with a flag raising ceremony, with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags raised alongside the Australian flag on Mouat Street.

Ends

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Caption 1: Celebrating NAIDOC Week 2017 at Notre Dame's Fremantle Campus.

Caption 2: David Pigrim and Phillip Walley-Stack perform for guests at Notre Dame's NAIDOC Week event.



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