

Atlantic Fellows

FOR SOCIAL EQUITY

# Holding the cloak

2022 Annual Review



**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live, work and play, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People of the Kulin Nation. We pay our deepest respect to them as First Peoples, their Elders and ancestors that have taken care of Country in Australia for over 60,000 years. In acknowledging Country, we extend that acknowledgment to the global network of Indigenous peoples, their homelands, Elders and communities.**

**The Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity program is guided by the principles and practices which have sustained generations of First Nations peoples and communities. These practices express a way of knowing, being and doing that is anchored in Indigenous knowledges. These values, protocols and systems of knowledge have sustained Indigenous communities in a way which sets Indigenous-led approaches aside from others. These approaches look to the critical role of our relationships, and the fabric of our kinship and cultural practices embedded within and across communities, including global communities.**

Image credit:  
[www.wildhardt.com.au](http://www.wildhardt.com.au)  
*Uncle Bill Nicholson  
and the Djirri Djirri  
Wurundjeri women's  
dance group.*





“

*This year has completely changed how I view Aboriginal affairs and Aboriginal policy, coming into this space I thought I knew everything about best practice for achieving outcomes for Aboriginal communities. This has been the best study I have ever done; the content and delivery have been amazing, the subject matter experts that we have in the room is second to none, and the readings we are engaging with have been designed and tailored specifically for us as Indigenous people.”*

JONATHON CAPTAIN-WEBB | 2022 COHORT



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The Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity Annual Review has been named *Holding the cloak* with permission from 2022 Fellow Holly Weir-Tikao; inspired by an essay written during her Foundation year and as a metaphor for Indigenous Leadership. The core value of the AFSE program is to support Indigenous leadership capacity by holding the cloak of our Atlantic Fellows and resourcing them to hold the cloaks of their Elders as they navigate intergenerational leadership roles within their own communities. (Holly's full essay can be read on page 10)





# Chair's Report

## Belinda Duarte



We are delighted to share this annual review of the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity (AFSE). Our community continues to grow and fuel our efforts to Indigenous-led social change. This year we welcomed 21 new Fellows into our midst to join the 50 who are already part of the Global Atlantic Fellows (alumni) community.

Highlights this year included our first group of Fellows graduating with their postgraduate qualification in social change leadership. This is AFSE's first graduands under the revised program and is testament to the standard of excellence produced by the hard work of staff and Fellows. Another highlight was the gathering in Thailand of all Fellows that graduated from the foundation year across all seven programs over the previous 3 years. AFSE had 2 cohorts of Fellows eligible and many of them attended. The dissolution of the Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation in May 2020, having given away all their money, was marked by a leadership gathering in Thailand where the Board and Senior Program staff were invited to participate. The gatherings were productive in that it enabled people to connect after COVID and begin their collaboration journey with Fellows and leaders from other programs. This year also enabled AFSE to connect with our partners the University of Auckland through an in-person module held in Auckland in October.

Image Left: Advisory Board member Prof. Melinda Webber and Belinda and Duarte  
Image right: 2021 cohort graduation, credit James Henry

Sadly, this will be my last review as I step down as Chair of the Advisory Committee after the first Board meeting in March. Like all Boards, it is important that the program has the right mix of knowledge and skills to support and challenge the team as the program continues to move forward. I have enjoyed my 4 years as Chair of the Advisory Board and wish the new Chair and Board members all the best with taking the program forward.

I wish to thank my fellow Advisory Board members for the service they have given over the year. This year we have had 3 resignations from the Board, Professor Shaun Ewen (University of Griffith), Professor Melinda Webber (University of Auckland) and Global Atlantic Fellow, Alison Bentick. I want to thank them for their support for the program over the last few years and we wish them well in their new ventures. I also wish to give thanks to the AFSE team for another successful year.

**Belinda Duarte | AFSE Advisory Board Chair**

*“I'm no academic, but I have a thirsty desire to learn. I've never built a house, but the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity has given me tools to build a better tomorrow”*

HAROLD LUDWICK, | 2021 COHORT



# Deputy Chair

## Professor James McCluskey AO



In 2022 we celebrated and thanked our donors for the significant support for the University of Melbourne (UoM) over many years and particularly the *Believe Campaign*. The generous donation from the Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation that enabled the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity (AFSE) to be formed was a feature with both Senior Fellow Shane Webster (2019 cohort) and the Executive Director, Professor Elizabeth McKinley both speaking to the donors. It was a point in time made possible by the generosity of Chuck Feeney who has been a champion of social change and medical research through his donations all over the world.

We had our first graduation of the 2021 cohort in August. In addition, four senior Fellows from the 2018 and 2019 cohorts who upgraded their qualifications graduated in December. The University and the Board extends their congratulations to all the graduands. This was a significant milestone that formalises the Atlantic Fellows of Social Equity as a vigorous academic program and builds Indigenous capacity and capability in Indigenous leadership across the region.

In March I made the trip to Oxford University to attend the Atlantic Institute (AI) Global Board meeting, which was held alongside various other meetings including that of the Executive Directors and Communities of Practice. The AI Governing Board had not seen each other face to face in over two years so one of the main outcomes was to rekindle the relationships between the members and learn what had been happening at the Atlantic Institute, including some staffing turnover and restructuring. This was a useful starting point for a discussion about the purpose of AI, which was then carried forth in Thailand.

In July, after more than 2 years dealing with the pandemic, the Atlantic family met in Phuket, Thailand. The gathering included Global Fellows, Board members, Directors of Atlantic Philanthropies and

many invited guests. Of particular importance was the delayed acknowledgment of the dissolution of Atlantic Philanthropies in May 2020. In addition there had been a restructure of significant positions in the organisations, including Executive Directors and Board Chairs. Importantly the leadership meeting discussed Board renewal and succession, and how the Atlantic Institute ensures the spirit of the program is not lost.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne had requested a review of the composition of the AFSE Board to ensure it had the right skills matrix going into 2023. The Board had experienced a number of resignations from directors moving into new positions, and it was reduced to three members. The Board is currently undergoing a renewal phase including the AFSE Chair, Belinda Duarte stepping down as the 2nd Chair of the Board.

On behalf of the University and the AFSE program I would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to Belinda for the work she has put in over the last 4 years, under difficult circumstances. Belinda approached the role with immense enthusiasm and oversaw the transition in leadership and reinvention of the program structure.

We are delighted to welcome the new Chair of the AFSE Board, Professor Ian Anderson, who has recently taken up the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University of Tasmania. Ian is a former Pro-Vice Chancellor at The University of Melbourne and was a key player in the creation of the AFSE program. His national profile and highly respected leadership in Indigenous Health will ensure effective and strategic governance of the AFSE program.

Finally, I wish to thank the AFSE team led by Professor Liz McKinley, Associate Professor Nikki Moodie and Sarah Fortuna for their tireless work and effort on behalf of the program. The program goes from strength to strength on the back of their remarkable dedication.

**Professor James McCluskey, AO FAA FAHMS**

**Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Deputy Chair, AFSE, Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor, The University of Melbourne**

# Executive Director's Report

## Professor Elizabeth McKinley ONZM



This year marked the 5th anniversary of the establishment of the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity (AFSE) at the University of Melbourne. AFSE continues to work hard to consolidate and strengthen the program and build a community of changemakers. 2022 continued to present us with challenges as we continued to work with a global pandemic while at the same time 'learning to live with COVID'. After a year of delivering entirely online (2021) everyone was pleased to return to face-to-face classes. Modules were presented as a mixture on online and in-person pedagogy as COVID continued to strike Fellows and staff alike.

The AFSE fellowship program contains robust academic content, which we continue to review and update yearly, while at the same time the program continues to hone the leadership and professional skills of Fellows to advance collective leadership for social change. Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity assign considerable value on both place and relationships as part of our driving force and a guiding frame in all our work. This is to ensure that we advance our work for the benefit of all Indigenous communities and particularly those communities from whom we learn.

AFSE offers a postgraduate qualification of a coursework master's, with an exit point of a graduate certificate, in the foundation or first year as an AFSE Fellow. It is a bespoke degree that only the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity can enrol. The program consists of six modules during the year – five modules work on developing ideas to increase their understanding of social change in Indigenous contexts and to build their nominated projects. The year culminates in the sixth module with a presentation of their social change project. Across all modules we travel to gather on different Indigenous peoples lands across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand to experience and learn on Country. This work is a key vehicle through which the Fellows engage with the program. We were also pleased to have our first graduation in August this year for the 2021 cohort.

In April we managed to have our first in-person AFSE Senior Fellow gathering, bringing together Fellows across the three cohorts. It was an opportunity for the 2021 cohort to meet each other in person, having spent all their time in the foundation year online, and provided an opportunity for cross cohort connections and reconnections. It was wonderful to be able to host them all again in person.

In addition to our local gathering, two AFSE cohorts (2019 and 2021) were invited to the global convening in Phuket, Thailand in July. This global convening brought together approximately 300 Atlantic Fellows in an opportunity to connect with Fellows across other programs, to discuss shared concerns and challenges across nations.

The Board, the Pou and Senior Program staff were invited to attend a marking of the dissolution of the Atlantic Philanthropies Board. This celebration had been programmed for May 2020 but with the pandemic it was postponed until 2022. The short conference featured a number of invited speakers, including the Directors of Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation, the Global Atlantic Institute Board, and two of the AFSE Pou taking part in featured panels.

AFSE were joined in 2022 with four new staff; Hineani Roberts (Communications Lead), Dr Fi Belcher (Impact and Evaluation), Jo Wilson (Executive Coordinator) and Luther Lyon (Research Assistant). We also farewelled Amanda Young (Partnerships and Engagement). During the year we saw a change in Administration Assistants from the Melbourne Indigenous Professional Employment Program (MIPEP) as they rotate through university departments and programs. Avanah Brettschneider left us to go to a position with the Royal Melbourne Hospital and Makayla Preston came to AFSE.

I would like to thank the Board, Pou, visitors and speakers who participated in the modules. I would also like to thank the staff who worked for the AFSE Fellows and program behind the scenes and who contribute to the smooth running of the program. Their contributions to the program are invaluable and we appreciate their active engagement with the Fellows. We also wish to thank our partners, both individual and organisations, who have assisted us to deliver the AFSE program. And last, but not least, I want to thank the AFSE team for their incredible hard work who enable us to reach the high standard that the AFSE program is becoming known for.

**Prof. Elizabeth McKinley ONZM**  
**AFSE Executive Director**



# Holding the cloak

## A metaphor for Indigenous Leadership

By 2022 Atlantic Fellow for  
Social Equity  
Holly Weir-Tikao (Ngāi Tahu)



*The following passage is adapted from a reflective essay submitted for the Indigenous Leadership Module as part of the requirements for the Master's in Social Change Leadership. Holly is from Te Waipounamu (South Island) in Aotearoa New Zealand and is currently the Project Manager at TIPU MAHI: South Island Māori Health Workforce Development Project. Acknowledgements to Holly Weir-Tikao and her Whanau for allowing us to share their story.*

This reflective essay will unpack the characteristics and values of my own Indigenous leadership practice using the experience of uncle Pete's investiture into the New Zealand Order of Merit on 4 July 2020 to explore how this pivotal experience has shaped my thinking, learnings, and knowledge of Indigenous leadership practice today. This story uses the event to interrogate my place as an Indigenous leader within the themes of whakamā (shyness and self doubt), through holding the physical and metaphorical cloak of leadership.

As a person who has been displaced from my tribal lands for many years, I would generally only see uncle Pete every so often, so I was excited to receive a call from him mysteriously inviting me to "this thing they're doing at the marae."

Further investigation with extended family members revealed this "thing" was uncle Pete's investiture into the New Zealand Order of Merit, and he had agreed to accept the award only on the condition that the investiture ceremony take place at Koukourarata Marae (Indigenous Māori meeting house) where Māori self-determination and tikanga (correct Māori protocols and customary systems of values and practices) preside.

For the occasion, uncle was adorned with a traditional family cloak, approximately 180 years old, that was temporarily released from the Te Papa National Museum archive.

Uncle Pete had asked me to sing his waiata kīnaki (song of support) for his acceptance speech at the ceremony, however when I arrived early at the marae and saw the crowds starting to gather it became apparent that space would be limited so I began to feel anxious and unsure of where I should be positioned during the ceremony. I could see the many tribal leaders, officials and

dignitaries who were gathered and, as we moved inside, I noticed the seats reserved for uncle Pete and his whanau were fewer than expected. I quickly moved to the back to sit on the floor next to the seats. As everyone took their seats, I quietly congratulated myself. This was the best possible outcome for me - here I felt safe and comfortable, out of the public view, away from the cameras and taking up the least space possible. Plus, from my position on the floor, I got to sit very close to uncle Pete.

As the time arrived for uncle to deliver his korero (speech) and as he stood and started speaking, the very old and treasured cloak began to slip from his shoulders. Secured around him by safety pins, the delicate fabric began to tear, with uncle trying to readjust the cloak whilst continuing his speech. The family and I exchanged worried looks - what would happen if the cloak tore or fell off? Each time uncle moved, the heavy cloak began to slip again, and we could sense the challenge and concern he was experiencing. If the precious cloak tore or completely fell off, mana (dignity) would be lost during the process. As the only family member seated on the floor, I was less visible to the crowds so responding to a nod from my cousin, I jumped up from my location and readjusted the cloak on uncle's shoulders intending to immediately return to my position on the floor, but as soon as I moved my hands the cloak started to slip again. I shot my cousin a terrified look which was meant to convey "help! What should I do?" He shrugged back as if to say, "well you're stuck up there now I guess." That

**“ Indigenous leadership requires overcoming individual fears, colonial impositions and expressions of shame and 'making small', in order to best serve when needed.**

HOLLY WEIR-TIKAO | 2022 COHORT



is how I came to be the only person standing with my uncle, holding this traditional ancestral cloak on his shoulders during the entirety of his acceptance speech at his investiture.

If I am completely honest, I do not recall all the words in uncle Pete's speech, I was feeling caught between intense layers of whakamā and the awe of what was transpiring. Without a word exchanged between us, I felt uncle physically relax knowing I was behind him and knowing I would not move but would stay with him holding the cloak. The horror of how quickly things had changed from me being hidden on the floor to suddenly finding myself standing publicly at the very centre of the proceedings felt stark against the silent conversation that was happening between my uncle, myself, and the cloak.

From my standpoint, going to uncle's investiture held conflicting emotions – whakamā and a reluctance to 'take up space' or be in the spotlight, contrasted against the privilege and responsibility of delivering his waiata kīnaki. Positioning myself on

the floor was a comfortable choice – an in-between space, hidden from view. True introspection reveals that in that moment, it also suited me to physically hide. This is recurring theme in my own Indigenous leadership practice – the dualistic nature of fulfilling responsibilities and being in service to my community whilst also questioning my place, suitability and/or ability to serve.

***“The cloak of leadership was physically and spiritually heavy and it humbled me deeply to have the experience of supporting my uncle to hold it up.”***

HOLLY WEIR-TIKAO | 2022 COHORT



*Holding Uncle Pete's Cloak*  
Image credit: Sampson Karst Photography

I often feel torn between the desire to hide and quell feelings of whakamā as they arise, and the sense of duty to fulfil responsibilities asked of me by hāpori (community) or as dictated by contextual cultural situations. The experience of holding uncle Pete's cloak humbled me in a unique way. It was tika (right and correct) for someone in the family to uphold the mana of uncle Pete in that situation.

Wairuatanga as the embodiment of spiritual elements which are often not recognised or accepted as valid in Western models of practice however it was very significant in my experience of holding the cloak. The cloak of leadership was physically and spiritually heavy and it humbled me deeply to have the experience of supporting my uncle to hold it up. There was a great honour and deep learning in the spiritual and wordless conversation that happened between uncle, myself, and the cloak.

Heavy is the burden of those who are charged to carry the cloak, but invaluable learning came from the immediate sense of aid I was able to provide in simply standing and supporting the servant leadership of uncle. These are the learnings that inform my thinking on what values are needed to carry out social change work in the future because, like the title of this essay, there are bound to be future situations where I am the one holding the cloak.

Indigenous leadership requires overcoming individual fears, colonial impositions and expressions of whakamā, shame and 'making small' in order to best serve when needed. The learnings from the experience of standing and holding the cloak with my uncle are things that no amount of literature could impart to the same degree, however analysis of what it means for my Indigenous leadership practice in the future will help consolidate the learnings from the Indigenous Leadership module for social change work now and in times to come.

My final words are for my uncle: Thank you for calling me to stand. *E te rangatira, moe mai rā i raro i te korowai mahana o tōku nei aroha mōu.* Cherished chief, sleep peacefully under the warm cloak of love I have for you.

**“Indigenous communities are at the centre of the work and lives of our graduates. In choosing to back Indigenous peoples across the Pacific, Mr Chuck Feeney, through his Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation, has indicated he believes in us to believe in ourselves, to find our own solutions. And to value Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing within the global Atlantic Fellowship community.”**

**PROF. ELIZABETH MCKINLEY**  
AFSE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



# Learning on Country

## Reflections of immersive learning experiences

By Tegan Burns and Christian Lugnan  
Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity



Although Indigenous cultures and worldviews throughout Australia, Aotearoa and the Pacific are diverse and embody many local differences, connections to land and place are shared foundations of our ways of knowing, being and learning and are inseparable from our identities.

Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity (AFSE) takes a unique approach to immersive learning environments, providing Fellows the opportunity to explore 'place' as a critical tool for collaborating with Indigenous people, anchoring project work in histories of land and as an essential element of thoughtful and ethical leadership. During 2022, the AFSE cohort travelled to Minjerrabah (North Stradbroke Island) and Aotearoa as part of the foundation year of the Fellowship. Below, Fellows talk about their participation in these immersive learning experiences and the importance of connection to land in place-based learning environments.

**Tegan Burns 2021 Atlantic Fellow for Social Equity, Quandamooka woman from Tjerrangerri / Minjerrabah (North Stradbroke Island, Queensland).**

I'm lucky enough to live and work on Country, so a lot of the things that I was writing about for my assessments during my foundation year in 2021 were linked to work that I was doing here in my community and on this land. For me, Country plays such an important role; it's who we are, it's how we identify ourselves. When Mob meet, it's the first thing we ask: Where are you from? Where's your Country? Who's your mob?

There are stories that are embedded within the landscape that you can only learn and experience by being in that place and on that land. Being able to host other cohorts here in 2022 was a special experience for me. We talk about how we are in and of the land, we never think of ourselves as being superior to that plant or that animal, we are part of the same ecosystem. Plants and animals are our brothers and sisters and we all need to care for and look after one another to coexist together, just like a family. It was empowering for me to be able to have the 2022 AFSE cohort come and connect with me here on my Country Tjerrangerri / Minjerrabah (North Stradbroke Island).

I'm not the most confident person when it comes to talking in front of people. But being on Country, I feel strong, and able to connect and communicate and teach and share my story because I am grounded and I feel my ancestors around me.

***How do these experiences of 'being on Country' inform your project work?***

When I started my project, I really wanted to focus on the strength and resilience of my people, Quandamooka people. We know there is intergenerational trauma within our families and within our communities. But I also see the strength and resilience within my community and I really wanted to capture that. As my project developed, it became intertwined with my connection to Country and the role that connection plays in building on our strengths. I began interviewing members of my community from Elders through to young people about how their connection to Country impacts and influences their lives. I focused on one area of the island, with the aim to eventually turn the project into a short film series capturing different significant places.

The role of Country within the work that I do and within my project work is both significant and essential. Capturing those stories of connection across different generations, from an Elder down to the youth in our community and what that connection to their land means to them, is essential to privileging the lives and voices of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal land.

“***Capturing stories of connection across different generations, from an Elder down to the youth in our community and what that connection to their land means to them, is essential to privileging the lives and voices of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal land.***”

TEGAN BURNS | 2021 COHORT



I was not only able to share these connections with the new cohort of Fellows during the 2022 host exchange, but the experience also provided an opportunity for the Minjerribah Moorgumpin Elders to cater for the group and prepare native food from the island. It takes a lot of time and energy to go out and gather the fruits and berries, and all the different seafood. It was a really special experience for the group and people were emotional while they were eating their lunch because of that deep connection, and the abundance of beautiful foods that nourishes us from the land and sea. This became part of the learning and sharing experience.

**Christian Lugnan, Gumbaynggirr man based in Garlambirla (Coffs Harbour, New South Wales, Australia)**

***What is the benefit for you of on-Country learning?***

Yidaa Jalumbaw, Yidaa Yilaana, Goori-gundi Wajaarr. - Always was. Always will be Aboriginal land.

For me as an Indigenous person, mindalaygam Wajaarrda learning on Country and immersive

educational approaches are essential as you can't learn about Indigenous knowledges just via textbooks or by someone sharing information in a workshop or a seminar. Certainly, with the North Stradbroke Island experience, the way I learn best is to feel, touch, see, and smell the place or Country the knowledge is coming from. When you're learning from people who are from that land and you are on that land, you're getting firsthand experience and knowledge from them that you won't get through any other mechanism.

“As Indigenous peoples, we connect through our relationship to Country and we are all connected through sea Country. Although we are separate people(s), Māori and Goori people (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), sea Country connects us all and keeps us grounded and together. It is our way of understanding each other.”

Learning on Country is also a safe way for us Mob to learn, we can respect our protocols of welcoming others and tell our stories in the way we need to. You can't get that through other means.

It's one thing to live on your own Country and learn from your knowledge holders and the people who



2022 cohort on Tjerrangerri / Minjerribah country (North Stradbroke Island, Queensland).

have certain responsibilities or knowledge of particular areas. But it's such a lovely thing to visit other people's lands because those people who you're meeting and who are sharing with you are connecting with you on multiple levels. Whilst you're meeting with someone that is physically in front of you, you're actually meeting with their ancestors as well. It is a deep reciprocation of sharing.

***Do you have a story that was a highlight for you being on Mijerribah - Stradbroke Island?***

While I was on the Island, I saw there was a photo they had hanging up of a Gumbaynggirr Elder (who had passed); it was actually the grandfather of my wife's best friend. In the photo, Uncle Kenny was holding a rock, an axe head. I asked a couple of people there, "what's that photo all about?" I was told the story of how the rock had been relocated by non-Aboriginal people down to Coffs Harbour and how Uncle Kenny had returned and gifted it back to the Island. It was about 20 years ago and none of us knew this story. That was a beautiful connection that I found my people had to that Country up there. It was very emotional and healing. This experience helped me to connect back to my own community and project work.

Learning on Country for me reiterates the importance of connection to our environment which gives us fullness and ongoing health and wellbeing. In the Country around us, we experience goodness, benefit and draw strength. Country also provides awareness and directness. When you're experiencing things with a group of people, Country provides what is needed for connection with others.

***“As Indigenous peoples, we connect through our relationship to Country and we are all connected through sea Country. Although we are separate people(s), Māori and Goori people (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), sea Country connects us all and keeps us grounded and together. It is our way of understanding each other.*”**

CHRISTIAN LUGNAN | 2022 COHORT

***“The one thing I've learned through this year is how to find the keys to unlock those doors that keep us disempowered and to really find impact. And the way of finding impact is through education... Education is giving me the opportunity to open the door for my people.”***

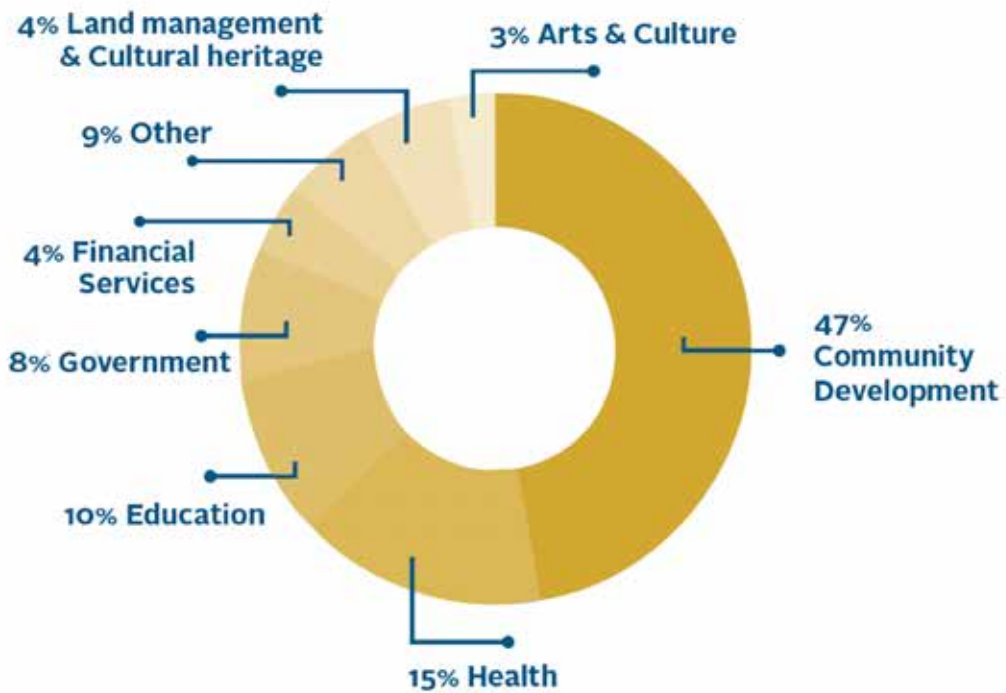
STEPHINA SALEE | 2022 COHORT

# At a glance

## Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity 2022



## Fellows diversity by sector





# What is the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity?

The Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity (AFSE) is an inter cultural fellowship for Indigenous social equity in Australia, Aotearoa and the Pacific region. We are working for Indigenous-led social change to build on the collective strength, and leadership Indigenous people bring to the world.

AFSE was established at the University of Melbourne in 2016 with funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies, established by philanthropist Chuck Feeney. It is one of seven global, interconnected Atlantic Fellows programs across the world.

Our Fellows are exceptional, mid-career change-makers with a track record in social change initiatives, and experience in Indigenous-focused projects. They come from a broad range of creative, professional, advocacy and educational backgrounds. Cohorts across programs include lawyers, artists, advocates, business professionals, health practitioners, government officials, academics and researchers.

## How is AFSE unique?

AFSE is the only Indigenous led Fellowship program with intake targeted to First Nations communities across Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Nations.

AFSE Fellows form partnerships and work with Indigenous communities and organisations to generate Indigenous-led social change. They have demonstrated experience working with Indigenous communities on social change projects.

AFSE Pou/Elders in residence are Indigenous intellectual leaders and knowledge holders who work alongside Fellows and bring guidance, support and cultural safety.

## The Foundation Year

Fellows undertake a Master of Social Change Leadership at the University of Melbourne. They are required to attend 38 days of programming to complete six modules in the year and to deliver a social change project at its completion.

A key part of the Fellowship is the social change project. Throughout the foundation year Fellows will refine and develop their social change project in each module, drawing on the most current and impactful critical Indigenous scholarship from Australia, Aotearoa and around the world.

## Lifelong Fellowship

Upon completion of the foundation year, Fellows become *Global Atlantic Fellows* and attend their first convening with other change-makers from across the seven hubs around the world. This global, lifelong network is coordinated and led by the Atlantic Institute, located in Oxford. In 2022: 683 Fellows have been drawn from 68 countries.

AFSE also offers Lifelong Fellows the opportunity for continued connection with their home program, through supporting cross cohort collaboration, hosting events, funding support and promoting the work of Lifelong Fellows.

AFSE's approach to Lifelong Fellowship includes expectations unique to the Indigenous context and the geopolitical location in which we work, and includes;

- An orientation to Indigenous thought and scholarship.
- A commitment to lifelong learning, extending the research-informed approach of the Foundation Year.
- A focus on induction to senior fellowship, expectations and opportunities.
- Supporting the transition of Senior Fellows from the foundation year program into evaluative thinking in project planning, resourcing, reflexive practice and identifying supportive opportunities.
- Supporting AFSE Senior Fellows' preparation for engaging with the Atlantic ecosystem.

# **Social change stories from Global Atlantic Fellows**

## **The transformative power of healthy disruption**

By 2018 Atlantic Fellow for Social Equity Michelle Steele | Article first published in the University of Melbourne 'Believe the impact of your giving' 2022



On a cold, wintry Melbourne morning in 2016, Michelle Steele, a Kamilaroi/Gomerioi woman from Moree, and a career public servant for over a decade, steps out of a female prison. It's her first visit to this prison, or any other. The experience has left an indelible impression.

"The federal government was looking for ways to lift employment opportunities for Indigenous men and women exiting prison in the hope it could reduce recidivism. As part of a report called Prison to Work, I had the opportunity to listen and engage with female prisoners. They were really generous in sharing their stories that led them to be there."

They were just as articulate about what they wanted, expected and hoped for upon release. Employment opportunities and housing support as a way to be reunited with their children were common themes. But one comment in particular struck Steele.

This inmate told me, 'When I step out of this prison, it's supposed to be my fresh start. But I'll start it in someone else's clothes.'

Asked what that meant, the inmate said it was unlikely her old clothes would fit. Her only option would be to pick seconds from a clothing bin outside the prison gates.

As Steele walked out of the prison, rugged up for the Melbourne winter, she could see the clothing bin, overflowing with old, ragged castoffs. "I thought, how hard could it be for these women to have access to fresh clothing and a decent bag to put them in?"

## Philanthropy unlocked a new path

The experience led Steele to think more deeply about what it meant for women leaving the prison system, and how important and complex it was for them to be deciding and driving their own fate. Three months later, she heard about the Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity, a life-changing fellowship for Indigenous social equity in Australia, Aotearoa and the Pacific region, made possible by the generosity of The Atlantic Philanthropies.

As Steele explained, she felt compelled to apply: "For somebody working in social public policy, it was incredibly important for me to do something I felt genuinely passionate about, as opposed to something I was positionally responsible for."

Several months later, she found herself part of the very first cohort at the University of Melbourne and on the cusp of a life changing experience.

"I'd never really been able to spend a year concentrating on building, learning, researching and networking a particular aspect of policy. The Atlantic Fellows allowed me to do that. It allowed me to test and be accountable for a project. It allowed me to make connections I would not have made. And, it gave me 14 more sponsors for my project."

It was the collective input from her peers, all equally invested in her project's outcomes, that opened up new paths Steele hadn't fully anticipated.

***No matter what I do in the future, I'll be thinking about things as a system – about the value of structural change and how disruption, if done with trust can embed positive social outcomes. And that's work I simply would never have done without the Atlantic Fellows program.***

MICHELLE STEELE | 2018 COHORT

"When I started the Fellowship, I had big plans of setting up new support systems. But through mentors, connections and the constructive interrogation of my fellow Fellows, I realised these structures already existed. They just needed to work better. Instead of creating additional layers for these women to navigate upon their exit from prison, I discovered I needed to find healthier ways to disrupt the system."



On completing the formal foundation year of the Fellowship, Steele doubled her efforts to focus on working with not-for-profits and other organisations who already existed to deliver the types of services her clients needed. But rather than focus on creating a new initiative, Steele is grateful the Atlantic Fellows program gave her the courage to drive change on several existing support systems.

“These women deserve better. They deserve more than any one person working on any one project could ever give them. And that change in attitude, between the way in which I approached my leadership pre-Fellowship to the way in which I approach it now, has been a really big learning.”

## Leading from the front in a pandemic

What the Fellowship had also done was prepare Steele as well as anyone could be for one of the most pressing health concerns of our time, COVID-19.

As the pandemic first reached Australia, it sent out ripples of alarm and concern – particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Appointed Assistant Secretary for the Indigenous and Remote Policy and Implementation Branch on the National COVID Vaccine Taskforce, Steele’s role has been pivotal in shaping and driving public policies to protect Indigenous communities in lockstep shaped by these communities.

From the get-go, Steele knew Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities needed early action. “We needed Indigenous experts at the table. And we needed to embed that expertise within the structures that already existed.”

In the case of COVID-19, the most important structure was the Australian Health Protection Principals Committee (AHPPC), the federal government’s key decision-making committee for health emergencies.

“At the heart of it, my job was to translate the needs of the community to public health policy, not define it. Every time I was on the phone to them, my job was to ask, ‘What does this mean to public policy?’. And that’s why it’s been so successful.”

Steele holds up the vaccine rollout program in western New South Wales as a particularly strong example. “The most effective thing we did was to support an Indigenous liaison team led by health experts such as Associate Professor Ray Lovett. We said to him, ‘You’re a public health expert. You have familial links and existing relationships with health services in this area. Can you lead the engagement of the vaccination effort into western New South Wales, because our people, our families, our communities deserve this expertise?’”

As a result, vaccination coverage lifted from 19 per cent to almost 70 per cent in less than a month. For Steele, the reason why is obvious. “Sometimes it’s not about us imposing the answers. It’s about encouraging others to lead. That relies on the strength of our relationships and the trust within them.”

## Growing her influence

As the vaccine rollout picks up pace, Steele is focussed on ambitious vaccination targets.

“Our marker is 100 per cent. We’re not going to aim for anything less. It’s about doing the best for our people, our families, our communities and for our continuing cultures. We’ve read how colonisation and introduced diseases affected our communities. We still feel their impact on our culture. The last thing we want is a repeat of that.”

Steele hasn’t forgotten her exchange with the female prisoner on that wintry day in Melbourne, either. And she’s grateful for the train of events that have followed since. As for her personal goals, Steele will never stop looking for ways to unlock structural change.

***“I am a proud Aboriginal woman who knows the appalling statistics which reflect the inequity of our First Nations people. We all need to remember is that our families, our ancestors, have been here for over 80,000 years living and sustaining our people, our lands and for that we demonstrate we can and will be the solution for the future.”***

MICHELLE STEELE | 2018 COHORT



# Collaboration

## A Gift from Wiradjuri Country

by Indu Balachandran, 2021 Atlantic  
Fellow for Social Equity



2021 Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity  
Ella Havelka, Indu Balachandran and Marc  
Bennie at Wagga Wagga Yarns.  
Photo credit Joseph Mayers



Wagga Wagga Yarns was a much-awaited trip for some of the 2021 Atlantic Fellows. It was a gift from co-Fellow, Ella Havelka, a dancer and Wiradjuri woman.

We had come to the end of a year of being in fellowship from a distance. Many of us had toiled through our assignments for our degree in Social Change and were tired. Our relationships were largely moderated through technology with a few bursts of local sub-group meetings that were invaluable in the knitting of these strings of relationality. 2022 was to be a year of recovery and deepening fellowship with travel restrictions slowly lifting.

Ella Havelka's final fellowship presentation in late 2021 included a series of short videos. She danced on Wiradjuri soil, on the lands of her people in central Western New South Wales. Our fellowship and study centred Indigenous knowledges. We had explored epistemology, axiology and ontology, and how dominant systems of knowledges can elide and invalidate other systems. Those of us watching Ella's presentation were hypnotised by the reclamation and celebration of nation; communicated without a word.

In early 2022 we received an invitation to Wagga Wagga Yarns - to sink our heels into Wiradjuri Country. Yindyamarra began with a thoughtful invitation of a full schedule including spending time with Elders, spending time on Wiradjuri country walking, and the collective work of world-making in the form of weaving with local grass. The generous invitation reminded me of Indian weddings where the recipient is invited with family and friends to a celebration of individual, family and community.

Co-fellow Marc Bennie, and I, arranged to make the five-hour drive together. We settled into a quiet enjoyment of the drive, each other, and long periods of silence. It was the start of a way of being over the weekend.

Over brunch, harvesting, weaving, and dinner, we spent time with Elders, knowledge holders and elements of the land and landscape of Wiradjuri country. Ella's mother, Janna, whom we had heard of as being a force in Ella's extraordinary life, was a gracious and vibrant co-host. The guests were diverse in their interests and work: including a furniture maker with an interest in rope-making, a dancer who sat on an arts Board, a Board member of the Ella Foundation who was helping with organizational development, a farmer whose

family had toiled Wiradjuri lands for generations, a tourism specialist who wanted to transform cultural engagement, and me, working to reshape the narrative of immigration as lawful relationality with First Nations, starting with my own Indian diasporic peoples.

The weekend finished with a walk along the Murrumbidgee River with local elder, Uncle James. In the spirit of knowledge transfer, a number of locals from nearby town Leeton had joined to learn and observe how Uncle James shared culture and ran a business. The walk brought to life the historical and contemporary ways of knowing and caring for Country and the erasure and reclamation of Aboriginal existence in the local township's spaces. A glittering mural above the theatre described Greek theatre and other pan-European traditions complete with Pathenonic remnants, and a clown-like figure in a tutu. We learnt about the resistance in the community to updating this imagery with something that spoke more truthfully

*“Being a part of this fellowship has honestly been such a transformative experience. I can't emphasise enough how crucial it has been for my development as a social change leader.”*

ELLA HAVELKA | 2021 COHORT

to the 60,000-year custodianship of the land and cultural traditions that continue to be practiced.

The group scattered gently after the walk, with gratitude in our hearts and new relationships and understandings. Finding our ways back to our homes I reflected on Ella's way of being. She had described Yindyamarra as the five connected fingers of her hand, as the five great rivers connected into the Murray-Darling Basin. They embodied the principles of respect, be polite, do slowly, be gentle and show honour. It is something I remember often when I use my hands nowadays.

# Aotearoa intercultural exchange

## Focused on Indigenous rights, sovereignty and treaties

AFSE Blog published 13 October 2022



During October 2022 the foundation year cohort traveled to Aotearoa for an immersive intensive module delivered by the University of Auckland, with a focus on Indigenous rights, sovereignty and treaties.

As a proud partner of the AFSE program, the University of Auckland is working closely to advance Indigenous communities through more equitable social outcomes. The week included being welcomed onto Makaurau Marae, sharing culture and tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), learning about the history of the Ihumatao community and their struggles for land rights, and meeting original members of the Polynesian Panthers revolutionary social justice movement. The AFSE cohort also visited Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei at Bastion Point and heard the stories of Ngāti Whātua and Whai Māia resilience and success.

Fireside chats – with Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Distinguished Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith and guest speakers from the University of Auckland, Dr Aroha Harris and Associate Professor Claire Charters – gave Fellows an opportunity to interrogate and identify pertinent issues when negotiating a treaty or making an agreement between Indigenous peoples and the state or Crown, both in historical and contemporary contexts.

“We are still learning what treaty means here in New Zealand and we are in a constant war of manoeuvre and repositioning ourselves in relationship to the colonising power which, for the most part, tries to prevail over the top of us,” said Distinguished Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith addressing Fellows during a fireside chat. “The proof of what we do is to be seen in the outcomes.”

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fellows, the opportunity to learn and reflect upon the complex experience of treaty for Māori sovereignty and communities was timely, as contemporary Australian treaty developments impact their work and communities.

“This past week was one of the most culturally enriching weeks of my life. Māori girrwa (group) of AFSE and the waaru-biin (people) we met in Aotearoa carried us on their wajaarr/whenua (land)

with so much hospitality, love and care. I will be forever grateful,” said 2022 Cohort Fellow and Gumbaynggirr man, Christian Lugnan.

“It was an emotional week to learn some of their story. It is similar to ours, in some respects, and also very different. Their continuity of sharing and knowing their history and culture was astounding. This was evident through all generations we met. Their story telling of place is phenomenal. We have lost so much but we are also learning so much from our ongoing revitalisation and reclamation journey. Our Māori cousins have got our backs and we’ve got theirs.”

“**Don’t wait for sovereignty to fall from the sky, get on and enact it everyday, as much as you can.**”

TE KAWEHAU HOSKINS | UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND, CO DIRECTOR AFSE

Image left: 2022 Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity Tara Moala and Holly Weir-Tikao playing taonga puoro (traditional Māori musical instruments) at Makaurau Marae

Image right: 2022 Cohort at Rangiriri Paa site in Aotearoa





# Global Atlantic Fellows Cohorts come together for Lifelong Fellows Gathering

AFSE Blog published 22 April 2022



Image credit: Peter Casamento

From 29 April - 2 May 2022, Fellows from the three completed Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity cohorts (2018, 2019 and 2021) came together for a Lifelong Fellows gathering on Wurundjeri Country.

The range of activities, hosted at the University of Melbourne with support from Pou Jackie Huggins and Mark Yettica-Paulson, created a real sense of reconnection between Fellows and a seamless introduction to the most recent cohort.

The first two days of the gathering saw the 2021 Cohort reconnect, and in some instances connect for the first time, and celebrate joining the lifelong global fellowship stage. Due to COVID travel restrictions, the Australia and Aotearoa-based 2021 Cohort Fellows were only able to meet in person within their home countries during their foundation year.

Having reconnected, the 2021 Cohort were then joined by the earlier cohorts for the final two days. Over the course of these days, Fellows strengthened and built new relationships and explored shared challenges and opportunities.

The gathering preceded an upcoming global Fellows event the Atlantic Institute hosted in Thailand in July.

**“The fellowship has given me the time and space to think deeply about how change happens and connect with others who believe that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are the foundation for the change we want to see.”**

**KATRINA SMIT | 2021 COHORT**



# 2022 Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity

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**Christian Lugnan**



**Dr Raylene Nixon**



**Carolyn Barker**



**Damein Bell**



**Holly Weir-Tikao**



**Dr Tui Crumpen**



**Jewelz Petley**



**Dameyon Bonson**



**Jaki Adams**



**Simba Marekera**



**Jonathon Captain-Webb**



**Karla Brady**



**Sarah Morris**



**Michael Coleman**



**Michelle Johansson**



**Pania Newton**



**Shonella Tatipata**



**Stacie Piper**



**Tara Moala**



**Te Awa Puketapu**



## Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity Advisory Board

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The Advisory Board provides strategic oversight and guidance to the program. Board members have extensive experience in a range of areas and sectors including Indigenous rights and advocacy, academia, the arts, health, not-for-profits, philanthropy, the public service and start-ups.



Belinda Duarte | Chair



Prof. Jim McCluskey AO FAA  
FAHMS Deputy Chair



Prof. Melinda Webber

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## Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity Pou

Pou – Indigenous intellectual leaders and knowledge holders – work alongside Fellows and bring guidance, sustenance and cultural safety. Building upon established models of Elders-in-Residence at the University of Melbourne, their role is enhanced by the concept of Māori Pou. Pou are carved posts erected on land to express the identity and ancestors of a place, to designate or hold up ‘place’ for a particular purpose and to contain knowledge. The term Pou is often used metaphorically to refer to people who are teachers and experts, who guide and protect others and anchor a particular project or philosophy in place.



Prof. Daryle Rigney



Dr Jackie Huggins  
AM FAHA



Prof. Linda  
Tuhiwai Smith  
CNZM



Mark Yettica-Paulson

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**“AFSE is proud to place Indigenous pedagogies, research translation and community-building at the heart of our work with Fellows. The best and most critical research – from Indigenous thinkers and those who walk with us – is clear about the ingredients for social change.”**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR NIKKI MOODIE | PROGRAM DIRECTOR

# AFSE Team

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The AFSE team finished 2022 with a few more members on Board than in 2021, welcoming new members (Hineani Roberts, Fi Belcher, Luther Lyon, Makayla Preston) and saying farewell to others (Sally Zanic, Avana Brett Schneider and Amanda Young).



**Professor Elizabeth McKinley ONZM**  
Executive Director



**Associate Professor Nikki Moodie**  
Program Director



**Amanda Young**  
Partnerships and engagement



**Sarah Fortuna**  
Associate Director (Operations)



**Jo Wilson**  
Executive Coordinator



**Dr David Pollock**  
Program Course Coordinator



**Dr Fi Belcher**  
Research Fellow (Impact and Evaluation)



**Luther Lyon**  
Research Assistant



**Sangita Iyer**  
Program Support Officer



**Hineani Roberts**  
Communications Lead



**Nathan Fioritti**  
Communications Officer



**Makayla Preston**  
Administration Officer

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Full Bios of Atlantic Fellows for Social Equity, Advisory Board members, Pou and Team are available on our website [www.socialequity.atlanticfellows.org](http://www.socialequity.atlanticfellows.org)

