

Action now to reconcile differences

All Australians need to raise their voices against the widening inequalities between Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous citizens, said Adelaide Catholic school students as they reflected on Reconciliation Week held last month.

St Ignatius' College student Georgia De Conno said she witnessed firsthand the many inequalities between the two cultures and equally experienced the joy of embracing cultural differences.

"We take things such as food, health, education and employment for granted, which creates a huge gap in inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians," she said.

Georgia spent 11 days with her school immersed in an Indigenous community on Bathurst Island earlier this year.

"Reconciliation Week means a lot to me," she says.

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) was celebrated across Australia between May 27 and June 3 to commemorate the significant reconciliation milestones of the successful 1967 referendum and the High Court Mabo decision in 1992. Catholic parishes and schools across the Adelaide Archdiocese took part in various prayers, liturgies and events to mark the week.

Mount Carmel College students Talera Gollan-Davey and Waniki Gibuma-Marr said the 2014 reconciliation theme of "walk the talk" meant more action was needed to end the rhetoric.

"It's important that all Australians speak out against injustice and have a deeper understanding of Australia's past history and look towards a united future," said the teenagers, who attended a unique Indigenous Leadership program run by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) in the days preceding Reconciliation Week.

The Yellakka Yellarkarri (meaning Today Tomorrow) program involved 64 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 11 Catholic secondary schools across the diocese joining together in Adelaide from May 19 to 23.

Dr Roma Aloisi, CEO Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Team senior education adviser, said the 'YY' leadership program would continue through an online forum and follow-up educational events



UNITY: St Ignatius' College student Georgia De Conno, pictured here with a Tiwi Islander child at a local watering hole on Bathurst Island, is among Adelaide diocesan Catholic students who say Reconciliation Week is an important date on the Australian calendar.

and meetings planned for later this year.

Dr Aloisi said Yellakka Yellarkarri was an important initiative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Catholic schools because it enabled networking while raising self-esteem, building cultural identity and creating a sense of belonging.

"This is a unique space in Catholic education for the students to do this," she said.

"Most of the students who attended are one of a few Indigenous students within their school, so this is a way of connecting

them in a forum where they are dominant, while providing them with a skill set to be proud of their cultural heritage and to be leaders of the future."

The group attended Tauondi College to focus on cultural identity, community, racism, prejudice and resilience building. They visited the University of South Australia's Mawson Lakes campus to investigate post-school pathways and met with two Indigenous lecturers. Students also connected with community elders and were involved in a moving ceremony on the final day.

"The program has helped me be more proud of who I am and not worry about the racist remarks people say about me because...what they say and what I know about myself are two different things," said Rostrevor College student Davin Ferreira.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College student Halimah Milera said the prospect of attending university no longer felt so daunting following Yellakka Yellarkarri. "I think that it isn't that scary now because I am going to have support around the uni to help me succeed, which I think is very amazing."

