

SEEDS OF PEACE

PHIL Blich AND EARTH LIGHT

'To feel happy about yourself, you must feel happy about the place you live in. To feel happy about the place you live in, you must get to know that place. To get to know that place, you must ask the people who have lived there the longest, the Aboriginal people. We have the key that can open the treasures of this land'
(Boori (Monty) Pryor *Maybe Tomorrow*)



'Reconnection' is at the heart of the work of **Phil Blich**, in seeking to overcome the violence experienced by his fellow Aboriginal people today, built as it is on two centuries of dispossession, destruction, discrimination and *dis*-connection. Like many Indigenous people in urbanised Australia, Phil is himself not from the Aboriginal country in which he



lives. Yet all the more he sees it as important to 'reconnect', to re-learn the stories and songs of the land and to build up pride and culture, especially amongst young Indigenous people who are so vulnerable to the violence of self-destructive behaviour and being caught up in the criminal justice system. Working closely with local elders, and in partnership with all others of goodwill, Phil is thereby nurturing vital ecological 'seeds of peace' in the Darkinjung country of the Central Coast area of New South Wales.

Phil's work of reconnecting takes place at a number of levels, not least through the **Mingaletta Aboriginal Corporation** on the Woy Woy Peninsula and through **Earth Light**, an Aboriginal-led Anglican parish-based project in Gosford which is seeking to reclaim prime Aboriginal heritage and culture. As Phil explains it:

The three circles of the Earth Light logo express the three stages of the project (Ceremony – Research/Collate/Interpret – and Tell) and are symbolic of a ripple effect of healing, from the inside out. The ceremony or core represents the spiritual heart of the Earth Mother. LIGHT stands for Listen, Interpret, Gather, Heal, Tell.

Earth Light Activities

Community Reconnection and empowerment

The most important area of Phil's work is related to empowering local Aboriginal people to address key issues of health, employment and community development. This involves building partnerships with others in the wider community, and practical initiatives including educative camps, art and cultural work and the creation of a network of community gardens. Each week Phil also holds a campfire gathering bringing people together.



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Aboriginal Cultural Experiences and Community Reconciliation

Earth Light also offers Aboriginal welcome and guides to significant sites of the Darkinjung people, the traditional custodians of the land. This involves: traditional storytelling, bush tucker, bush medicine and ochre demonstrations, deepening awareness of the natural beauty of such places as Somersby Falls, GIRRAKOOL and the Bulgandry rock engravings. In addition, Phil and his colleagues are asked to take part in local cultural celebrations such as Woy Woy's *SpikeFest*, whilst Involvement in local Reconciliation is also an important feature of this work.



Reconnecting with the Land

Crucially, Phil's holistic approach to reconnection involves working with other partners towards a new appreciation of and relationship to the land itself, based on reconnecting with its spirit and story. Two key elements in this have been:

Partnership in the 'Ourimbah Protocol'

- an innovative agreement between NSW State Forests and several organisations, creating a 'Social Contract' to deliver 'the four bottom lines' of Sustainable Social, Economic, Environmental and Cultural Outcomes, recognising the need for healthy, balanced and bio-diverse eco-systems. Fundamental elements include securing clean water and clean air, developing sustainable harvesting and sustainable tourism and looking at forests as spiritual entities – offering precious retreats, playgrounds for re-creation of body and soul and spiritual reconnection. To enable this, protection and reverence are essential: reverence not least for Indigenous history, respect for the cultural and spiritual beliefs which forests provide for its descendants and for all Australians who recognise our need to reaffirm our common heritage and core human values.

Telling the Story of this place' - the GIRRAKOOL Group

In the face of much unhelpful development in the past and ideas for the future, and with the support of Russell Maule of the Combined Community Organisations, the GIRRAKOOL Group seeks to bring people together to identify '*the song of the place*', looking for guidance from its Indigenous inhabitants in identifying the harmony and structure needed to build a healthy, sustainable community. The group suggests the following elements are needed for sustainable development on the Central Coast and elsewhere in Australia: cultural mapping (listening to, collecting, and really *hearing* the stories and songs), 'shared spirits, one dream' (interpretation and translation), 'acknowledging the sacrifice' (telling the story, singing the songs, obtaining third party endorsement) and 'accepting ownership' (beginning the healing, erecting appropriate memorials and enacting ceremonies: '*Gosford as a whole must tell "the story of this place"*'. *From the mountains, to the foreshore and everything in between, there must be a holistic, coherent vision*

Sources and more information:

www.anggos.com/earth.html