

We Indigenous people are stronger than we believe, and smarter than we know

[Chris Sarra](#)

Of all the billions ever born, it is we who share the blood of the world's oldest civilisation on the planet – we have survived, now we must thrive



'The battle to create equal futures has a frustratingly long way to go. Plenty of people must play a part.' Photograph: David Gray/Reuters

Sunday 10 July 2016 12.28 AEST Last modified on Sunday 10 July 2016 12.45 AEST

Some years ago, I was pretty down and I thank those who stood by me during this time ... a time when I had never felt so culturally, spiritually or professionally disempowered but you continued to believe in me, and gave me licence to keep believing in myself.

This honour in some ways belongs to our ghost children.

Those Aboriginal girls and boys, who chose to die by their own hand, who no longer believed that the future could be better, or that they had a place in it.

It belongs to Indigenous students rotting in classrooms that no minister or millionaire would send their children to ... to those kids I say this: in more than 500 Stronger Smarter schools nationwide, students just like you, are coming to school, staying in school and succeeding.

And you are not forgotten ... and we will come for you.

This honour in some way belongs to Indigenous parents and communities, across Australia, who are working with schools to deliver on the life-giving promise of a stronger smarter future.

It also belongs to more than 2,000 school and community leaders in this education revolution for our children. They've worked their guts out to deliver what most thought was impossible.

Your work honours Aboriginal Australia and Torres Strait Islander Australia and the teaching profession. And I salute you for this.

For as long as I can remember, thanks to my mum and my dad, I've always known that being Aboriginal was awesome. That I was no better or worse than any other. And that hard work, service and compassion was my obligation.

That even in the face of inhumanity, I should treat people as I wanted to be treated.

Those values and beliefs strengthen my core and kept safe my soul.

Armed with this truth, even when victimised, no one could make me their victim ... not the government, whose laws stole the land that my grandfather Broome was promised in return for his hard work.

Not the drunk neighbour who called us little black bastards, even when we mowed his lawn for him.

Not the teachers who had limited beliefs in who I was and what I could achieve.

Not even the university, which used my black face to attract money for projects, but then couldn't trust me to execute its delivery.

None of your racism, none of your hurt, none of your lies that others said about me or my culture rang true. None broke through to that precious place where my self-belief resides.

The battle to create equal futures has a frustratingly long way to go. Plenty of people must play a part.

To those of us who feel broken or insufficient, who feel anything but powerful, remember this: of all the billions ever born, it is we, Australia's first people ... we alone share the blood of the world's oldest civilisation on the planet.

And to this end, this note, I have a message for Jack Dempsey, mayor of Bundaberg, to [Annastacia Palaszczuk](#), premier of Queensland, and to Malcolm Turnbull, who will probably be the prime minister of Australia.

I am a descendant of the Gurang Gurang and Taribilang Bunda people.

And when you are ready, and when you have the courage and you are bold enough, I am ready on behalf of my people and my people are ready to speak with you about a treaty.

For tens of thousands of years, our sovereign nations shared borders, trade and travel. Our laws were strong. Our faith was deep. And our songs enchanted. Culture enlightened our souls, and dreamings lit the way.

The past 200 years, by contrast, were everything the past 50,000 years were not.

In the blink of an historical eye, we were banished to the edges of the worlds we'd governed for eons.

There was a disruption to our excellence. Our parents and theirs were stripped of all they loved – their kids, homes, land and culture. Our people weren't called slaves, but laboured as

such – shackled, starved, never paid wages. Black diggers fought and died for a nation that denied them the right to vote.

The damage and privations continue for many today.

And I acknowledge those complexities and stand with you in acknowledging that all Australians have a part to play in resolving them – that is a truth.

But other truths are also at play. Those challenges, as complex as they are, do not define us.

Those who despise or pity us or think we are less, their blindness, that is their affliction and loss. And it doesn't matter how many blackfellas they can line up to help them believe that.

We are more than victims and mere survivors. The scars we carry aren't who we are. They aren't signs of guilt or capability. They are not the truth about our potential or capacity.

They are a part of ourselves that still need healing. And healing cannot happen while ever we believe the lies that we are a weak, desperate people, devoid of humanity and incapable of helping ourselves.

The truth is this: we are stronger than we believe and smarter than we know.

For 50,000 history-making years, our old people lived like kings in lands where camels die of thirst.

They stood as ironbark – upright, strong, tall, standing and unbreakable.

Their lessons, their songlines, their legacy and their dreamings. They are our true north.

They are the truth not only of who we were, but who we can be again.

My brothers and sisters, believe me when I say this.

We are stronger than we believe. And smarter than we know.

Solidly anchored by an honourable past, more than any other human beings on the planet, we can take our place in an honourable future. We have survived – and now we must thrive.