

TERRITORY Educator

Magazine Of The Australian Education Union - NT Branch



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We acknowledge and pay our respects to the traditional custodians of land and sea across the Territory. This publication was produced on Larrakia Land. It is our privilege to live and work here.



New members Imogen and Jordan signing up at this year's AEU NT welcome event following DoE induction

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Office Staffing Update:

While staffing in the AEU NT office is consistent heading into 2024, Special Projects Officer Melody O'Meara has left to resume relief teaching in the Territory. Melody continues in the elected position of Women's Officer. If you want to contact her in this capacity, email womens.officer@aeunt.org.au.

Office veteran, Mick McCarthy remains in the position of Special Projects Officer, taking the lead on industrial issues. Jengis Osman continues with industrial support and Bridget O'Dwyer leads membership and recruitment in the role of Organiser. The office is ably supported and kept in line by Administration Manager Janette Moore.

Branch Executive Election results are in!

We congratulate Amanda Vrymoet for winning the role of Indigenous Councillor, Alessa Fremmer on her re-election as Arnhem Regional Councillor, Nicholas Bailey for stepping up to represent the Barkly and welcome Candace Loane back, this time as a Darwin Regional Councillor.

Vacancies remain for councillors to represent the Barkly, Palmerston and Rural and Katherine regions. The reserved Vice-President (TAFE sector) position is also vacant. Any BIITE (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education) or CDU member is eligible for this role. Our TAFE sector membership may be small, but it is important, and work continues in its interests.

Any member interested in representing their region or the TAFE sector is encouraged to contact Branch Secretary Rachael Metcalfe at secretary@aeunt.org.au.

Your Member Fees

In line with the 2021-2024 Teachers' Enterprise Agreement, member fees are now indexed according to current salaries and union policy. The new fee schedule is available for download at <https://aeunt.org.au/membership/>. If you have any questions or believe an error has been made, please email admin@aeunt.org.au. Fees for members employed by school councils, anyone in an AO classroom support role and anyone whose employment falls under the 2021-2025 NTPS Public Sector ('General') Agreement, BIITE or CDU EAs have not changed.

Active Sub-branches Equal Effective Bargaining

It is vital there is at least one main AEU NT member contact for every workplace. This ensures effective communication between the AEU NT office and your sub-branch. This is particularly so with 2024 being an Enterprise Bargaining year. The current teacher agreement expires October 2024, and we want members in schools to be informed, activated, and prepared for negotiations and action: that is where you come in!

We can help with formally putting a new rep/s in place and recommend that all sub-branches hold their 2024 AGM at least a week before the deadline for Conference

registration and motion submission (Friday 22 March). Contact Bridget O'Dwyer at membership@aeunt.org.au with any changes to reps/contacts, information on activating your sub-branch and to book a school visit.

Central Region Retention Allowance Extended

Late last year, AEU NT confirmed that Attraction and Retention Allowances for Central Region classroom teachers will be extended to include teachers starting at any point in the year, not just those commencing Term 1. This is directly due to pressure from AEU NT. We commend members who have actively pursued us to achieve this outcome. It means that the \$1000 lump sum being paid at end of Term 1 for some, will now be paid for others once a full school term of employment is completed. The \$2500 lump sum due at end of Term 4, 2024 to teachers employed for all four terms will not change.

Netskope Nightmare: access (or lack of) to educational websites

Netskope, rolled out late last year, is a web content filtering agent at many NT schools. We received feedback from several sub-branches late 2023 about the limitations it has posed to the accessibility of educational websites on Department laptops. It is reported to be impacting teacher productivity, the ability to prepare quality learning programs and to verify student work during marking periods.

We recommend you provide feedback in the first instance directly to the Department via itmanager.doe@education.nt.gov.au. If you require action from the AEU NT office, then contact us via our online enquiry form at <https://aeunt.org.au/contact/>.

Members are encouraged to raise this issue within sub-branches and to feed it up through the union's Regional Council structures.

Raising the Roof: Government Employee Housing (GEH)

Provision of rent-free accommodation is a vital component to ensure our remote schools are properly staffed. Department of Education occupies 770 out of 1,800 NTPS GEH properties, making our footprint the largest of any agency. NTG centralised

the allocation and maintenance of housing for each agency into a single office within the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities at the start of 2023.

The AEU NT continues to seek further breakdowns of capital works, KPIs for dwellings inspected in the last 12 months and timelines for those still pending, agency budget statement including figures detailing security upgrades and a breakdown of how the \$8.6M slated for remote and regional teacher housing construction and upgrades in the Budget and Regional Overview 2023-2024 is being spent.

Let us know how your GEH experience is going via our online enquiry form at <https://aeunt.org.au/contact/>.

Stand down pay, unmoveable appointments and the myth of 4:21 strikes again!

At the close of 2023, it was clear that the myth of 4:21 had reasserted itself. To clarify (again!), the working day for teachers does not finish at 4:21 as per standard public service practice.

Following consultation at the close of 2023, AEU NT is satisfied that DCDD (Department of Corporate and Digital Development) Directors do understand the longstanding working arrangements of teacher employees and will now be refreshing guidance notes and reminding their teams of its availability. We expect that more consistent and accurate advice will come from DCDD officers to members and managers within the DoE going forward.

We ask members to note that unavoidable appointments can be accommodated within school hours by agreement when they align with non-contact time and do not need to be entered as personal leave. Also be aware that 4:21pm is a standardised finish time used across NTPS IT systems but is not relevant to physical departures from school grounds of school-based teaching employees.

If you believe you are being ordered otherwise, please contact the AEU NT office.



NTSDE (Northern Territory School of Distance Education) members welcome Bridget O'Dwyer to their workplace

DRIVING *Change*

Branch President Michelle Ayres focuses on member voice as we head into a new enterprise bargaining round and continue advocacy to reduce workloads

As we draw closer to the expiry of our current teacher's agreement this October, our focus is on negotiations for a new one. It is a crucial time: for both your working conditions and public school funding at national and Territory levels.

On the federal funding front, the Northern Territory Government is still in talks for a new bilateral funding agreement with the Commonwealth, informed by the "Improving Outcomes for All" report, initiated by Federal Education Minister Jason Clare with the other Education Ministers.

There is no doubt that the government must properly resource education, then get out of the way and let us teach!

The report lays bare the pressing need to fill the SRS (School Resourcing Standard) funding gap in the Northern Territory, echoing what educators have long understood: our students need smaller classes for tailored learning, research-backed teaching methods, and learning spaces that are safe and inclusive. There is no doubt that the government must properly resource education, then get out of the way and let us teach!

Our core bargaining demands still stand. They are to reduce administrative overhead (creating smaller class sizes for individual student attention) and ensure the presence of skilled support staff in every classroom. These are the pillars of a quality educational environment, not luxuries, and it is time they are enabled by our funding structure and reflected in our enterprise agreement.

In the meantime, we continue to work hard with the Department of Education as consultations for the Teacher Workload Review Project continue. The joint target is to reduce the excessive administrative duties that only serve to distract from teaching and learning. We expect results from this process before mid-year.

Our collective voice and concerted efforts will drive the achievement of these significant changes. Now is our chance to make a lasting impact on the future of education in the Northern Territory, and I am committed to making the most of this moment.

Member needs and insights are at the forefront, shaping union policies and positions. Let's use this opportunity to positively influence an education system that can truly support our teachers, assistant teachers and support staff while nurturing our students.

It's time for meaningful change and, together, we can achieve it.



MAKING History

Branch Secretary Rachael Metcalfe reflects on her first year in the role and on the value of the ACTU Making History Conference



Left to Right: the ACTU Making History Conference and Sally McManus



Now that my first year as Branch Secretary has finished up and I've had time to reflect, I'd have to say that the most rewarding part of it has been visiting members in schools to discuss current issues, explain agreements and determinations whilst meeting members. The challenge of linking ideas in the education sector with other professions and related industries from a union point of view has also been one I have enjoyed.

It has been my privilege to assist teachers and support staff with both individual cases and collective issues across 2023. I've been grateful for how my experiences in special education have informed this process.

There is no doubt that last year was a busy one with Conference, elections and office operations all needing to be managed. I thank both AEU officers and you – the members for your support.

Another highlight of 2023 for me was the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Making History Conference, held in Brisbane 20-21 June with AEU NT branch Organiser Bridget O'Dwyer. The biggest event on the 2023 union calendar, the focus was firmly on union organising skills with the event attracting committed unionists of every stripe. The Conference featured thought provoking and powerful plenaries as part of a comprehensive program of workshops with optional huddles each morning for special interest groups.

We heard from ACTU Secretary Sally McManus who explored the unique point in history that our movement holds. She celebrated the victories of the giants who have come before us and the important progress our movement has made. Sally highlighted significant victories for working Australians like the recent once-in-a-generation changes to industrial relations laws and paid domestic and family violence leave.

The "Doing Things Differently: A Festival of Dangerous Ideas" plenary was a forum for experienced leaders including ASU National Campaign and Communications Coordinator, Gillian Strong, UWU National Secretary Tim Kennedy and NSW IF General Secretary, Maxine Sharkey to share their thoughts on the challenges of recruitment and whether a digital union could be our salvation along with the scoping of key union roles: organisers recruit and activists lead.

Delegates had a difficult choice to make in selecting seven workshops to participate in from the 58 offered over the two days.

Strategies for member growth and retention were also addressed in workshops such as "Social networks not social media: using union communications to grow" and "Unions X: divergent thinking for reaching more workers" as well as comprehensive coverage of various political actions trade unions get involved in at member direction.

Valuable networking opportunities offered by this event aside, the AEU NT leadership team will be sure to utilise parts of the ACTU Insights research in collaboration with our Branch Executive and office staff to continually inform and improve our practices in the membership, campaigning, and bargaining spaces.

I encourage you to get involved in shaping the future direction of our union through sub-branches, regional councils, and our annual Branch Conference. I am always open to ideas and feedback from members so don't be shy about phoning me at the office if there is something you want to talk about.

I sincerely look forward to continuing to work with and learn from you all as the year progresses.

Whole SCHOOL, Whole CHILD, Whole FAMILY

Ampilatwatja School principal, Anni Adams, talks to Melody O'Meara about the joys and challenges of one of the Barkly's biggest remote community schools.

Ampilatwatja community is the largest community outside of Tennant Creek in the starkly beautiful Barkly region at the other end of the Sandover. The school, which now has an enrolment of over 150 and 88 in FaFT, started 42 years ago - under a tree and has since changed shape to become the "pretty, lovely, little school" that principal of 2 years, Anni Adams describes today.

Anni feels lucky to have the "quite gorgeous, good facilities that include an open-air basketball court, a good playground, and a beautiful, purpose-built pre-school."

The school has struggled with attendance of late, but in 2023 improved it by over 4%. Anni places the reason for this improvement down to consistency and dedication: leadership and teachers. "It's really about the families getting to know you" she says, adding that "having a stable, consistent workforce of teachers is essential because kids get to know them. Our staff are dedicated, and the families know and appreciate that."

Another factor is trauma, Anni shares that "since I have been here there have been six major deaths and explains that "what the children are doing is not necessarily grieving, but reacting to how their families are reacting. When families are grieving, they can't always do what the children want or expect. Everyone is out of routine. A lot of support is needed following community tragedies - and this one has had a lot."

In addition, the incidence of scabies and school sores out here is high. To try and reduce the risk of rheumatic heart disease down the track, they have integrated clothes washing and showering into the school's daily routines. Dirty clothes are taken away for washing and the kids are given a school uniform.

The difference is noticeable. More



(Top) Celebrating with a colour run at the end of the Amazing Ampilatwatja Race.

(Bottom) Our senior girls modelling the new shirts.

children are not only attending school, but many now arrive already showered and in clean clothes. The next goal? Educate and support families to wash their blankets and hang them out in the sun.

Despite the never-ending challenges, the school community is looking forward to initiatives like the arrival of a weather station and a traditional medicine garden, thanks to Deadly Science grants. The school has just signed a partnership agreement with the EON Foundation which delivers a nutrition-focused, healthy lifestyle and disease prevention program in conjunction with the school and local community. The Ampilatwatja women are well known for using traditional medicine; they collect it both for the home and the clinic. Anni is excited but circumspect, "we've got the money, we've got the space, but we're still figuring out how to do things!"

Thanks to a mental health grant, the school is chuffed to be able to provide a special uniform for the senior class and staff. It says Are you OK? in Alyawarr and in English and displays the Aboriginal lifeline number, 13 YARN. Of mental health, Anni says "I want to start putting a spotlight on it. I want people to be able to say, 'I have seen this before; I do know about it, and I can do something.'"

Meanwhile, teaching and learning continues with RWI (Read Write Inc) and Maths (the Barkly region's innovative "Learning Through Doing" team approach, prescribing skills not programs). The trauma informed Berry

Street model is also a cornerstone of the school, which Anni describes simply as being about unconditional positive regard, "making sure that a child walks in and feels welcomed and that we build their self-esteem."

So, what is the first thing Anni would do for Ampilatwatja School if a fully funded future became a reality?

"I would hire a specialist teacher who could take extra classes for RWI. Some schools have done amazing things with RWI, but they've all been able to have small groups. It's not possible here yet because we just don't have the staffing."

Between the Amazing Ampilatwatja Race made up of teams of 5 kids racing around the community, commemoration of the protest and walk off at Honeymoon Bore, an excursion to Melbourne, and the visit from their Melbourne sister school, 2023 ended on a high with Anni feeling that these things are "as important for staff as for the students."

When quizzed about her vision for Ampilatwatja School headed into a new year, she says, "I haven't got a vision, you just do things along the lines of where you want to make a difference and see what happens...what we are really doing is educating the whole child and the whole family."

We can't wait to see what 2024 has in store for this big, little school.



Making MEMBERS VOICES HEARD!

The 2023 Branch Conference in review, 2024 key Conference dates and setting your sub-branch up for success!

Our 2023 Branch Conference was held at Rydges, Palmerston for the first time and a diverse range of delegates from all over the Territory were welcomed.

The OCPE and Government have signalled their willingness to undertake and complete bargaining for a new Enterprise Agreement in the first half of this year so don't wait to get organised. Be sure to complete the member bargaining survey recently emailed to all members.

Former Director of Safety, Culture and Care with Department of Education Kylic Darley Education Change Makers' Dave Faulkner spoke on workloads and led workshops on this pressing issue. Panellists Unions NT President David "Strawbs" Hayes, AEU NT Special Projects Officer Mick McCarthy and AEU Federal Women's Officer Emma Lowe shared practical advice whilst affirming the core values of unionism.

AEU Federal Deputy Secretary Nicole Calnan provided the keynote and, with Emma, led a well-attended workshop on activating sub-branches.

It was heartening to see so many young educators representing their sub-branches for the first time, making

up a large proportion of the 90+ delegates. About 70 motions were debated and we commend all delegates for their part in the collaborative process to amend, subsume and combine so many motions.

The experiment to join our usual Saturday night Conference dinner with the Unions NT May Day event at Tim's Surf'n'Turf was a roaring success. Darwin High School's Emily Parker and Casuarina Primary School's Rodney Gregg were the stars of the show - jointly taking out the AEU NT Sub-branch Rep of the Year Award. We thank Matthew Owen for accepting Rodney's award on his behalf.

We must once again thank major sponsor Fleet Network, represented by Zane Ryan, for their ongoing support of this and other AFU NT events. We also acknowledge Teachers' Health, Hall Payne Lawyers, and Australian Super.


Skip ahead to now, and this year's Conference is almost upon us!

Deadlines according to AEU NT rules are:

- Friday 22 March (end Week 8, Term 1 – 6 weeks before Conference): delegate registration (following election endorsement at a sub-branch meeting) and motion submission. Visit our website for how to register and submit motions.
- Friday 5 April (end Week 10, Term 1 – 4 weeks before Conference): draft Conference agenda and motions made available to members.

Message to reps for 2024: your importance to Conference AND Enterprise Bargaining

It is vital that there is at least one main AEU NT contact for every workplace. The current teachers' agreement expires this October, and you are key to members in schools being informed, activated, and prepared for negotiations and action.



*Delegates enjoying the chance to get together at
Conference Photo credits: Dreammedia, Darwin*



Contact Bridget O'Dwyer at membership@aeunt.org.au to advise of any changes and for a chat about activating your sub-branch.

The OCEP and Government have signalled their willingness to undertake and complete bargaining for a new Enterprise Agreement in the first half of this year so don't wait to get organised!

How many delegates can my sub-branch send to Conference?

Each sub-branch, no matter its size, can send at least one delegate. For every 20 + 1 members you can send another delegate.

For example, a sub-branch with **30 members = 2 x Conference delegates** (one because each workplace can send a delegate;

another one because there are more than 20 members. If there were 41 members, this sub-branch could send three delegates). All delegates must be financial members of the union at time of registration.

If you want to attend but aren't sure you'll be able to make it or your sub-branch has filled its delegate quota, contact the office to discuss proxy and observer options. All Conference related communication should be directed to conference@aeunt.org.au.

We look forward to seeing delegates from as many workplaces as possible, making Conference a decision-making body that is truly representative of our union.



FULLY FUND TERRITORY SCHOOLS NOW - *For Every Child*



Brian Gray reiterates the need for equitable public school funding both nationally and in the Northern Territory.

Every Territory teacher knows that this is a unique place to teach - uniquely challenging, but also uniquely rewarding. Over 70% of our schools are classified as remote or very remote, more than a quarter are tiny, with fewer than 50 enrolments, and our students' needs are among the most complex. That's why the calculated amount of funding that it takes to meet minimum academic standards, known as the SRS (Schooling Resource Standard), is far higher in the NT at \$32,291 per student than it is anywhere else in the country.

But did you know that NT schools are only getting about 80% of that money? That's over \$6,000 not being spent on every child in an NT public school in 2023 alone. In fact, right around Australia, a decade after the Gonski reforms that first proposed a needs-based funding system, only 2% of public schools are fully funded according to the SRS. Meanwhile, teachers and support staff continue to give 110% (at least!) to students and continue to paper over the cracks in our schools whilst carrying unsustainable workloads.

With a PM and a federal education minister both publicly committed to getting all Australian public schools back on the path to full funding, the time to act is now. The AEU wants to see all states and territories get to 100% of SRS during the lifetime of the next bilateral funding agreements that are currently being negotiated with the Commonwealth. How can we make this happen? The answer is simple: political pressure!

We need to show the Albanese Government that Australians still value public education, and that public school funding is an issue with the power to swing elections. How do we do that? By getting everyone who values public education to pledge their support. We need all who work in them (whether union members or not), parents, all who were taught in them, and anyone who simply wants to live in an educated society to back this campaign.

That's why AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe, Branch President Michelle Ayres, and Branch Secretary Rachael Metcalfe were at the 2023 NT Education Leaders' Summit in Darwin. Some of our staunchest member principals and assistant principals in attendance bravely spoke out to the media about the chronic underfunding in their schools. It's also why AEU Federal funded last year's epic road trips across the nation. The Territory leg consisted





I thank all the members across the NT who took to this campaign with gusto: talking to colleagues and school councils, spruiking it to parents at school gates, and campaigning in your communities. You all told me you love your jobs and would much rather be teaching or designing great lessons than organising barbeques or collecting signatures! So would I, to be honest. But it's only by creating massive engagement from the whole community that we will achieve the change we need to see in our schools.

That's why, wherever you are in the Territory, we ask you to stay engaged in this campaign in 2024 – don't go slow on this life-changing reform. We can't wait another decade for Gonski. **Fully fund public schools NOW!**





BOLD, BRAVE
And a little bit **BRASH**

AEU 2023 Federal Women's Conference delegates reflect on the gains of their political lobbying experience in the heart of the nation

In an audacious piece of decision-making, AEU Federal, in consultation with the AEU Women's Officers' Network, decided to turn the 2023 annual Federal Women's Conference into a political lobbying extravaganza in Canberra, demanding audiences with federal MPs (Members of Parliament) and senators from electorates across the nation. The lobbying formed an essential part of the AEU National Public Education Campaign: For Every Child, demanding that public education be properly funded at 100% of the SRS (School Resourcing Standard).

The Northern Territory was ably represented by urban delegates Lauren Adsett (Darwin High School), Michelle Corera (Woodroffe Primary School), Anna Benson (Katherine High School) and remote Aboriginal delegates Holly Supple-Gurruwiwi (Gunyarjara FaFT) and Amanda Vrymoet (Ramingining School). Amanda Pehi (M'Bunghara School) was all set to represent Teaching Principals but was stymied by the lack of relief teacher availability, a reality that speaks to the need for proper funding in itself! Joined by Branch Secretary Rachael Metcalfe and led by Women's Officer Melody O'Meara we proved to be a formidable and well-prepared team.

"Attending the Federal Women's Conference in person in our nation's capital was not only an eye opening and humbling experience but also one of my most empowering achievements as a female educator. I'm thankful for the chance to have met delegates from across the country as well as those from the NT who, between them, hold decades of cumulative experience in teaching, learning, leadership, language and culture. These women made me feel safe, respected, confident and ok to show my vulnerabilities as a female educator. Initially, I thought the opportunity to lobby our federal politicians was my privilege, but now I recognise that sharing our stories and our voices is our responsibility

(L-R) 2023 AEU Federal Women's Conference delegates celebrate their lobbying success on the steps of Parliament House; Delegates pictured with Senator Malarndirri McCarthy and Member for Lingjari Marion Scrymgour; Putting the finishing touches on lobbying stories.

as educators and it is the politicians' privilege to hear from us! We must always advocate for our ourselves and the future of our students. My privilege was being a part of a group of strong, educated, culturally diverse women."

Michelle Corera, Woodroffe Primary School, PAR Branch Executive Councillor (2023)

"Attending the 2023 AEU Federal Women's Conference was a powerful and enriching opportunity. Being surrounded by strong, educated women who sought to encourage and inspire despite their own adversities and challenges gave me the hope I'd been searching for: hope for a better future in education for women and, most importantly, hope for our children.

Lobbying for full federal funding of NT public schools was an experience I'll never forget. Taking the voice of remote Aboriginal communities into the offices of Parliament House was a privilege and an honour."

Holly Supple-Gurruwiwi, Gunyarjara (Ski Beach) FaFT Educator

"It was an absolute honour to stand side by side with such amazing women from across the country. I feel I grew a little taller, with pride and empowerment. Always a positive buzz in the air and a sense of nourishment throughout. I am absolutely thrilled to have had this opportunity and look forward to following through on our pledge to demand better for public education together."

Amanda Vrymoet, Ramingining School, Arnhem Regional Councillor (2023), Indigenous Officer (2024)

"I have been an active member of the AEU for two decades and, as a woman in leadership, hope to inspire and empower the next generation of amazing female teachers. The knowledge I gained from this conference added to my "coat of many pockets" and I was rejuvenated by the stories of strength shared amongst the sisterhood. I am proud to support the For Every Child campaign and will continue to demand educational equality for Northern Territory students across the country."

Anna Benson, Katherine High School Head of Campus

NEW EDUCATOR'S

Network Conference

New educator Darcy Fitzgerald talks about the highlights of the 2023 New Educator Network (NEN) Conference held in Canberra

Your first five years of teaching are tough. It doesn't matter who you are, where you are or when you began your journey - early career teaching is somewhat of a baptism by fire. Workload pressures, lack of support and growth opportunities, challenging student behaviours and high expectations all compound to force many teachers to leave the profession before their first five years are up.

It is these challenges and more which brought together an amalgam of unionist early career teachers from all over Australia and the Pacific to discuss the struggles (and joys) of being a new educator.

The 2023 edition of the AEU National New Educators Network (NEN) Conference was held in Canberra, ACT last November. AEU members from all jurisdictions were represented, along with a contingent from the New Zealand and Vanuatu teachers' unions.

Jakob Zarb, Mehadi Kazi, Tom Hermes and I - all Top End teachers - donned our warm jumpers and long pants to represent our colleagues on the national stage, in the nation's capital. The weekend kicked off with a welcome reception hosted by AEU Federal and Teachers Health. Given all attendees shared the common experience of early career teaching and strong union values, conversation and socialising naturally followed.

This was the theme throughout the weekend and all attendees - united by shared values and experiences - socialised, organised, networked with, and inspired each other.

The days were split between a healthy mix of workshops, excursions, presentations, and member-led seminars. Each session was beneficial to me as an early career teacher and covered topics like organising, national and international new educator experiences, Q&As with AEU Federal representatives, supporting diverse students and much more.

On the first day, we were fortunate enough to break with convention and experience some on-country learning. We boarded buses and headed 40 minutes out of town to Birrigai, a unique ACT outdoor education school. Here we walked on country and heard some history from the



Northern Territory NEN (New Educator Network) Conference delegates Darcy Fitzgerald (Dripstone Middle School), Jakob Zarb (Darwin High School), Mehadi Kazi (Darwin High School) and Tom Hermes (Laynhaypay Homelands School)

Capital's first inhabitants, the Ngannawal People. A real highlight was seeing the well trees (trees traditionally manipulated to become drinking water wells) and the cave shelter kitchen: hard evidence of over 25,000 years of traditional custodianship and care for country.

The unconventional format continued into Day 2 with us all being invited to organise and present our own seminars in the format of an 'Unconference'. This opportunity was taken up with vigour and all 12 sessions filled up in an instant!

The choices were overwhelming. Topics ranged from the four-day work week in schools, to teacher registration requirements by jurisdiction, to my own session on international solidarity. All sessions demonstrated the breadth and depth of expertise of the new educators present.

United through common values and experiences, we shared the struggles and joys with comrades who understood what early career teaching feels like. Each interaction, engagement, session, and experience were worthwhile, and made all of us better teachers and stronger union members.

If you are in your first five years of teaching and can go to the NEN Conference, we strongly recommend that you do so. It will fuel your fire to both teach effectively and activate your inner union fervour.

WHY Be A Union Member



Former AEU NT Vice-President and Life Member Stephen Pelizzo reflects on the benefits of and common motivations behind union membership

Teachers engage with unions for many and varied reasons, as do those who actively do not join. Equally, that engagement can range from time consuming leadership and activism through to nothing more than paying their financial dues.

It is worth noting that, while teachers make up the bulk of AEU NT membership, classroom-based support staff, Assistant Teachers, school council employed education staff, corporate office-based education staff and relief teachers are eligible for membership and representation. Union engagement with these voices works to continually improve advocacy and union understanding of a parallel set of workplace issues.

So, here are some reasons for joining:

A. Individual legal and professional support

Essentially this is the view that union membership is a form of insurance. Legal action taken against teachers is not common, but looms large in the psyche of teachers, especially principals. This can involve civil, criminal or performance issues and historically, our employer in the NT has shown themselves openly reluctant to support staff in these types of matters. It's worth noting that union funded legal support isn't guaranteed, that there are a few caveats and limiting aspects to how that happens, and that it is not an assurance of success. Regardless, it is an important factor in choosing to be a union member for many.

B. Being able to claim union dues as a tax deduction

Essentially, this means that membership is free.

C. Being part of the collective decisions around actions, pay and conditions.

The ACU NT is a remarkably grass roots driven democratic organisation, with major decisions of all sorts being referred to members. "Down South" colleagues are regularly astonished at the robust debate and non-hierarchical nature of our decision making, especially at annual conferences.

D. Connecting with fellow educators across a broad range of sectors, experiences, and cultures.

The sharing of concerns and collaborating on professional matters with peers for a direct say in a wide variety of forums results in all of us having input into policy and procedures through lobbying. This leads to at least some level of direct political power.

E. Leadership training and practical application, especially in the use of influence.

This is true of sub-branch representatives, regional council members, Branch Executive Councillors, and representatives on bodies such as the TRB (Teacher Registration Board) and national committees.

It is worth noting that, in all the above, there remains a persistent focus on the needs of students and their learning unique to teacher unions.

Internally, and in fact for nearly all the AEU NT's history, there has been an ongoing debate about whether we should be an organising or servicing style of union. Servicing unions are professionally led and do things for members. While no branch of the AEU is a perfect rendition of this, the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) is a good example of a more servicing style union.

Organising unions, on the other hand, spend their time and effort empowering workplace groups to solve many of their own issues. Again, while not purely so, AEU SA has this focus. For the AEU NT this has never been resolved, leading to common misunderstandings of what we can and cannot do, but also allowing members to choose how they relate to their union.

Certainly, there are a raft of positives to being a union member, and the more actively involved you are, the more you stand to gain from it.



Moulden Park sub-branch members see the collective value in union membership



**Sign up now
using the QR
CODE**

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

As Protection

Mick McCarthy explores the less obvious benefits of full engagement in professional growth and incident reporting processes



The evidence across Australian jurisdictions and internationally is clear: to keep teachers healthy and teaching reducing their workload must be a priority in every system.

In the year ahead, we will have an opportunity to, once again, move the industrial levers we have in the NT on teacher workload. Now that we are back in enterprise bargaining, we must use these levers to reduce teacher workload, reduce maximum class sizes and increase non-contact time.

The other piece of work already underway at the Department, closely monitored by AEU NT, is the Teacher Workload Review Project, with a focus on things that can be done now and are in the Department's and its schools' control. In the year ahead, we will have an opportunity to, once again, move the industrial levers we have in the NT. Now that we are back in an enterprise bargaining year, we must use these levers to reduce teacher workload, reduce maximum class sizes and increase non-contact time.

The primary purpose here though is to promote two vital pieces of teacher, support staff and other employees paperwork that, despite the keenness of some to dismiss or ignore it - do have to continue.

INCIDENT AND ACCIDENT REPORTING

All employees have a responsibility, set out in policy, and underpinned by work health and safety legislation, to report any accidents, incidents and near misses involving them. By recording, monitoring, and investigating incidents, we can learn and put in place measures or changes to prevent them from happening again.

AEU NT and the Department know there is already an under reporting of actual incidents, and that each unreported event is a learning opportunity lost.

Every employee, student or visitor who arrives at a school deserves to leave as fit and healthy as when they arrived. So, it is up to everyone to record incidents, both for themselves and everyone else.

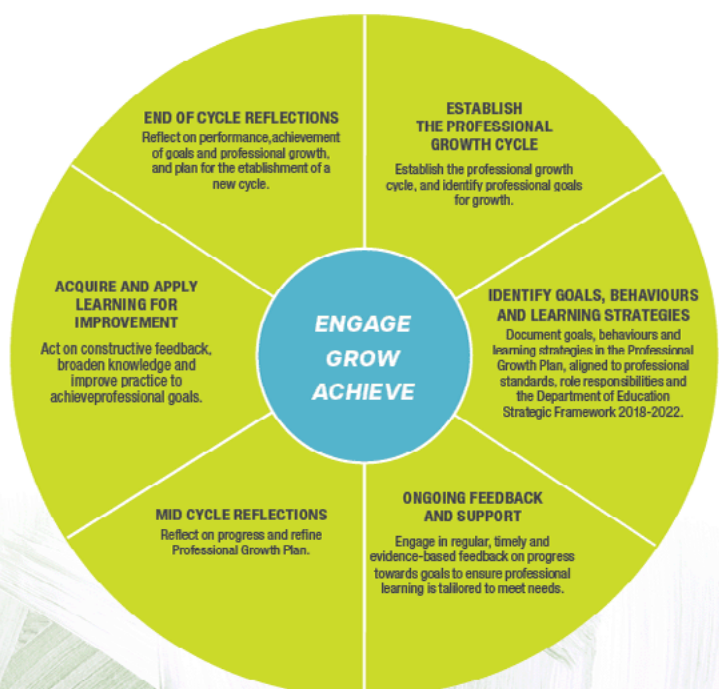
PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANS (PGPs)

Since their introduction in 2019, the current Department 'staff performance management' measure of PGP's has been increasingly taken up but, notably, this has not happened everywhere in the NT's system. With work pressures increasing, AEU NT is concerned they may be seen as optional by some. It is important to note they are underpinned by clause

79, Staff Performance Planning and Review of our Enterprise Agreement.

Both managers and employees are expected to engage constructively in the PGP process. Most of the time, when PGPs are approached in the manner suggested in clause 79, they provide a positive space for teachers to reflect on current practice and career goals then authentically use the results for professional development. They also serve to reduce misunderstandings and misperceptions of performance that do occur and, if left to fester, can prove far harder to debunk later and significantly erode workplace relationships. Smart school leaders accept personal responsibility for making sure their school has a strong culture around PGPs.

Thus, PGPs provide protection for both teachers and school leaders from falling into a position where underperformance is present, potentially leading to the formal Managing Underperformance Procedure (MUP). Beware that failing a MUP invariably leads to a teacher losing their job, in turn leading to a referral to the Teacher Registration Board and, ultimately, a possible loss of registration. In short, a MUP can be a career-killer



The department's professional growth cycle consists of six stages undertaken over a 12-month period.

Must I MEET WITH MY MANAGER?

Mick McCarthy explains the effectiveness of the Commissioner's Guideline 'Role of a Support Person' from the big boss of all NT government employees: the Commissioner for Public Employment

A fact of working life is that just about everyone at some stage is going to have to deal with a formally convened meeting with their (often) senior manager. Teachers and other educators are no different. Such meetings might be about already documented underperformance or inability but, more likely in our setting, they will be about a workplace incident or around allegations that have been received about you.

Longtime teaching career veterans of the AEU NT estimate that an individual teacher will hit a "patch of hot water" on average, about every 10 years. But you still have rights (from common law) and, more often than not, the opportunity to explain facts and provide evidence resolves the issue in a constructive way.

How to find out about those common law rights and what to expect in any investigation process will be one of the reasons many of you are union members, so read on. And if you are a sub-branch rep read on and keep as you will often be the best placed person to support a summoned member.

Modernised guidance to all the NT public service (NTPS) on the role of a support person was finalised in 2021. The Guideline might be called "Guidance" but it's from the big boss so it is to be followed and gives members and those seeking to assist them, much more clarity about how meetings should be conducted, allowing those members in the hot seat to better focus on the substance of why they are there.

AEU NT is pleased to have found that these guidelines are largely being closely followed by all managers, principals, and directors of the Department of Education. It should only be in extremely rare cases involving the most unusual and heightened of circumstances that this role will vary.

You will note in the Guidelines that support persons are not to advocate or 'story tell' for the employee they are supporting. However, there is a straightforward work-around this office has been successfully using and that sub-branch reps might utilise where they need to. The 'limited' support person role only applies when managers call meetings, not when union officers or sub-branch reps request a meeting with managers.

Thus, if AEU believes there must be active advocacy in a particular matter, we will request co-extensive meetings, providing an agenda, with the same manager, who summons our member. This means that, in practice, we will begin a meeting and cover the manager's agenda, acting as a support person. Once that is completed, we will move into our own agenda items and provide advocacy.

Finally, please note, the AEU office regularly briefs members and sub-branch reps who are about to become a support person in a particular member's matter. Do feel free to seek our advice and some handy tips.



Key elements of the current Guidelines include:

- Employees must be provided the opportunity to bring a support person.
- Recommended notice period for meetings is 48 hours.
- Employees to be advised of all those attending the meeting.
- Advance provision of either an agenda or the specific purpose for the meeting.
- Meeting notes to be provided after the meeting is concluded.
- Information about what can and can't be done in their role.
- Recognition that a support person need not be a silent witness.

AO Update

Latest wins, info,
and membership
advice for
classroom-based
AOs in schools

WORKPLACE ISSUES



Forrest Parade School members in solidarity with Branch Secretary Rachael Metcalfe

As you welcome new staff to your schools this term, don't forget to speak with your AOs to remind them that, if they work in classrooms, teaching and learning roles or teaching support roles that have direct contact with students like SESOs and SESAs then they are eligible to be members of the AEU NT.

We strongly encourage AOs to consider joining the AEU NT. Why? To strengthen AEU NT's ability to advocate and bargain in your favour both informally and formally. We are the only union at the table for NTPS Public Sector ('General') Agreement negotiations with expertise in the unique working conditions and professional obligations you face in schools. We can represent individual AOs and often work with small groups in schools to better understand workplace specific issues.

First WIN of the Year is for AOs

Our first member win of the year landed on 11 January this year. We received confirmation from the NT Commissioner for Public Employment that the miscalculation of pay rates for all 92% and 96% School Based Administration Officers (AOs) will not be treated as an overpayment. This is exactly what we lobbied for in November and December of last

year. The monies were small (circa \$30 per person), but let's be honest, no one needs the administrative burden of repayments!

First Aid Allowance for AOs

As most AO members are now aware, a First Aid Allowance is to be paid to those employees whose job descriptions require them to hold a current First Aid Certificate, in addition to named first aiders. This is a requirement under the 'General' agreement and affects a significant number of AOs across our schools. AEU NT would like your help to compile a complete list of all job titles that have this requirement. We currently know that 'SESOs' and 'Pre-School Assistants' are two such job roles affected. AEU NT will now be seeking to rationalise first aid training arrangements across the Department, making delivery more consistent. Please note that this is not an automatic payment, and we encourage members to speak with school leadership teams about it.

Contact us via our online enquiry form at <https://aeunt.org.au/contact/> with any job description info, questions, concerns or to share anecdotal experiences, whether successful or otherwise!

Acacia Hill School teachers stand with AOs during the 2020-2021 efforts to lose the pay freeze



THE LONG WAY ROUND

*Celebrating
a 49 Year Education Career*

Recently retired teacher Gwen Warmbirrirr talks with Brian Gray about her teaching career, her time in the union and her advice for young Yolŋu leaders and teachers new to community

Q. What was your journey to becoming a qualified teacher?

I was only 17 years old when I started working as a teacher aide. I was going to go straight to Batchelor to do Teacher Education Training straight after the cyclone (Tracy), but then me and the other teacher aides were told about the Bilingual Education film crew coming out to Mililjinbi-Yurrwi school.

There was an introduction about Bilingual Education at the school; before then I was only learning to read and write in English, growing up in the mission days. Going to Batchelor after that (for teacher training) was a good opportunity. I finished my teacher education in 1988. Straight after coming back home I started working in the school as a teacher. It was a really long journey for me in my education career at the school.

Q. What do you think makes a good Balanda teacher or a principal?

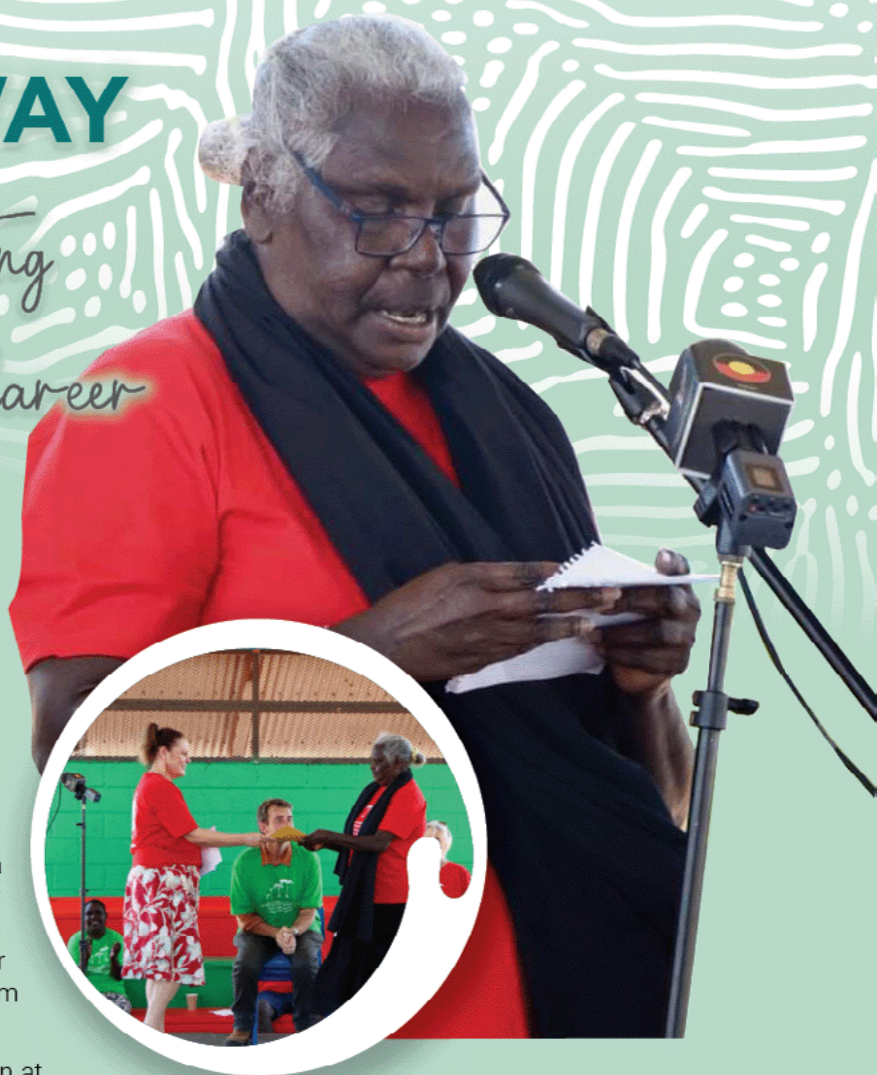
Balanda teachers and a principal who are being honest with the Yolŋu teachers and the community. They must negotiate with the Yolŋu people in the school and in the community.

Q. You must have worked with a lot of Balanda teachers.

A lot – I can't count how many!

Q. What advice would you give to the teachers from Interstate and Darwin thinking about coming to work in the community?

I say when you are coming out from your place and your state – from wherever your community is – and into the Aboriginal schools – here in Mililjinbi and elsewhere, don't bring your ideas into the schools without negotiating with the teacher linguist, Yolŋu teachers and with the community elders who usually come in to help teachers, both Yolŋu and Balanda.



Gwen speaking at the 2023 PULiMA Indigenous Languages and Technology Conference,

Gwen is invited onstage at PULiMA event to lead the celebration of 50 years of bilingual programs in remote communities

Q. What has been a highlight of your time with the union?

Early last year I was introduced to being a branch executive member. It inspired me about how to be a Yolŋu leader working with Balanda. I was the only Yolŋu in that group. It was a good opportunity being on that branch executive and more Yolŋu teachers should think about it. It was good for me because I could listen, and learn, and get inspired: How to be a leader? How to talk up to Government about the school? How can we make things better and good for the children?

Q. What would you say to young Yolŋu in education about joining the union?

I would say to the young Yolŋu leader: Don't be afraid to step out and have that faith and be strong. Be a strong leader and a strong advocate for your people.

INFORMED and INVOLVED

Justina Cross, Josh Danvers and Alisha Barriball form the Anula Primary School sub-branch representative team



Anula Reps

What do you prioritise in your sub-branch roles?

Our core commitment is to uphold AEU NT initiatives whilst being driven to ensure the wellbeing of all our work mates. This is always at the front of our minds and is what keeps us motivated and engaged. The sub-branch is currently working towards supporting Anula sub-branch members to upskill through participation in workshops and PDs to help ensure everyone is equipped to support new and current members.

We make sure we always have a representative at regional council meetings and the annual Branch Conference. We aim to meet informally as a sub-branch leadership team on a regular basis, with our sub-branch members, and check in regularly with individual members.

What aspects of being a sub-branch rep do you like?

We love ensuring that what the AEU NT has fought for is upheld and that staff have a choice of people who they can approach if they need support, advice or have a question.

What tips do you have for new sub-branch presidents?

Have regular meetings with school leadership to keep the lines of communication open and transparent. This leads to a happy workplace and keeps everyone informed.

What attracted you to education and what is it that you find most rewarding about your vocation?

Seeing the successes of students and colleagues, much-needed school holidays, and contributing to the school community.



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