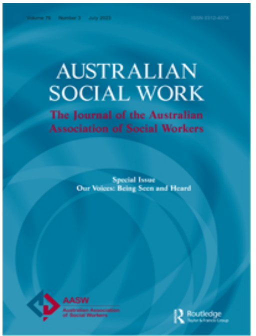

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A Yarn Among Social Workers: Knowing, Being, and Doing Social Work Learning, Expertise, and Practice

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ABSTRACT

Many social workers engage in Yarning and truth-telling. This worldview is important considering that Australian social work literature is historically informed by white western thought. This white lens has obstructed the self-determination of Aboriginal social workers and their communities. We came together as Aboriginal social workers and non-Aboriginal allies. Our authorship engaged dialogue and Dadirri (deep listening) with one another in reciprocal relationships. We thematically analysed, reordered, and preserved our Yarn in written text. Yarning with the use of Dadirri respected oral traditions of knowledge sharing and, in itself, was a decolonising act. Our aim to document Aboriginal knowledge and experience as social workers through Yarning, involved truth-telling about social work, social work learning, expertise, and practice.

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KEYWORDS
Aboriginal; Australia; Social Work; Yarn; Decolonising; Truth-telling

IMPLICATIONS

- A priority for decolonisation in social work is to value Yarning as a significant feature of knowledge sharing and a legitimate form of authorship.
- Decolonising social work requires things to be done differently, e.g., prioritising Indigenous social workers in developing frameworks for education and practice, and leading the implementation of these frameworks.

Background

Social work is institutionally white, founded upon western thought generated during European enlightenment and modernity. It is embedded within dynamics of normative framing, capitalism, and individualism (Tascón, 2019). This has discursively shaped what counts as social work knowledge (Tamburro, 2013), and has defined dominant

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metanarratives for application in teaching, learning, and doing social work (Yellow Bird, 2008). In Australia, whiteness "almost erased the Indigenous stories from the landscape of social welfare work" (Lynn, 2001, p. 905). An ongoing agenda to decolonise social work has drawn contemporary researchers to engage in Yarning and truth-telling. Nonetheless, "Social work continues to 'whiten' the landscape of academic literature and thereby undermine the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples" (Bennett, 2019, p. 43).

First Nations literature informing social work practice is limited. It is not "until we talk about everything, [that] everything we talk about is just whistling into the wind" (Pam Greer, interviewed by Tolliday, 2016). Without Yarning and documenting, reliance often falls on First Nations people to share expertise with non-Indigenous workers, re-risking colonisation, for example, of their knowledge (Dickson, 2020; Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2019). We undertook Yarning to prioritise and preserve spoken text and truth-telling. Our aims were to document Aboriginal knowledge and experience as social workers.

Yarning is a purposeful, formalised, and specialised method that brings together threads of knowledge and knowing in research dialogue. It uses Indigenous Australian circular linguistic styles (Mooney et al., 2018). Our Yarn involving all five authors combined dialogue and Dadirri (deep listening) with one another in reciprocal relationships (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022). Yarning is important for making better decisions, informing social work education, respect, and practice. It privileges Aboriginal voices, bringing rich insight about the world and what really matters to people (Mooney et al., 2018). Dickson (2020) shared that Yarning challenges current views and provides options for working with each other at the "cultural interface". Yarning involves sharing stories, is participatory, therapeutic, healing, and appreciates different evidence and theoretical perspectives. It enhances self-empowerment by making power and oppression visible (Andrew & Hibberd, 2022; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022). Yarning reveals what is known but not documented textually, thereby not heard, "silenced, then relegated to the periphery as deficit theory and practice" (Lynn, 2001, p. 903). Coming together to Yarn about social work enabled challenging of the academic world, as we inherited it, and to explore possibilities.

Decolonisation processes seek to reverse imperial power and promote healing and thriving. Muller (2016) identified models for decolonisation for Indigenous people and settler communities, after undertaking research involving the documentation of oral knowledge of First Nation Australians. Working together towards decolonisation is important. However, our anecdotal observations show continued misuse of *decolonisation,* resulting in colonisation of the decolonisation agenda. With respect, we place emphasis on Aboriginal voices as imperative. This includes valuing the work of Loraine Muller (e.g., Muller, 2016), and the leadership of Aboriginal social work academics like Bindi Bennett and Sue Green (Bennett, 2021, 2022; Green et al., 2016; Green & Bennett, 2018), and modelling allyship in Aboriginal space or shared space, or both. Decolonisation as an ongoing goal of social work must prioritise the Yarning of First Nations people.

Ways of Doing (Methods)

In response to the call for papers for this *Australian Social Work* Special Issue, we came together online and had a Yarn about social work's decolonising agendas, choosing to combine spoken and written authorship as a collective endeavour. We documented our

Yarning, a conversation that rejects reliance on text-based Eurocentric institutions in which social work is historically embedded. Our participatory engagement bridged Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authorship as a collective endeavour and purposeful decolonising act. We valued the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal connections between authors, the storytelling, and celebrations of who we all are as social workers. As one author Yarned:

> Walking alongside us, in allyship, is *extremely* important. There is not enough of us to do it alone, at this point, until we are given opportunities for self-determination. (Shirley/Nukunu)

As a representation of decolonising practice, we used a hybrid Yarn–text authorship style. Our "conversation" format was similar to that used by Claire Smith, Flinders University colleague, with Aboriginal co-authors (Pollard et al., 2020). The format offered a way of decolonising the structure of academic writing and authorship. It created a bridge that valued Aboriginal epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies (ways of knowing, being, and doing) by centring the voices of the Aboriginal authors.

Yarning authors included: Charmayne, a Malyangapa and Barkindji woman from far western New South Wales; Shirley from the Nukunu people in South Australia; Joanne, a Ngarrindjeri woman with cultural heritage from the Lower Lakes Coorong region, South Australia; and Libby and Helen, non-Aboriginal social worker/allies. We initially had several questions to guide our Yarn, but it took its own path following just two questions: *What is your social work experience?*, and, *What does decolonising social work in Australia mean to you?*

We used the technique of Dadirri in which the non-Aboriginal authors were relegated to deep listening. Dadirri is about listening, not about critical analysis in ways that may risk colonising or bastardising the Yarn. On every revision and iteration of the text representation of the Yarn, the Aboriginal authors reflected on the preservation and prioritisation of Aboriginal voices. Transcripts of our Yarn were reordered into three themes and edited for clarity. The final textual representation was approved by all authors.

Threads in Our Yarning (Results and Discussion)

Valuing Aboriginal Social Work

> Who would like to start? What is your social work experience? (Libby/ally)

> I always invite Charmayne to speak first because she's got rich stories … I really love being able to work with other Aboriginal people [because] when one has something, and the other doesn't, we share knowledge and bounce off one another's concepts and ideas. We generally all have an Aboriginal way of knowing, being, and doing, so it sparks other thought processes. That's the beauty, people interact. It's about having a Yarn and making understanding in an organic way. (Shirley/Nukunu)

> I have 30 years of professional social work in Australia, including as manager of a women's domestic violence court service and housing, emergency relief, lecturing in social work, facilitating professional development seminars, and consultancy in development of services delivered by ACCOs [Aboriginal community-controlled organisations] and non-Aboriginal services working with Aboriginal people. I've created and managed Family Group Conferencing [and] Aboriginal Connection services for families, giving families opportunity to implement plans to address concerns before DCP [Department for Child Protection]

open a case. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

I've worked in government for more than two decades, as a financial counsellor, then social work practice with DCP and Department of Health. I am now a businesswoman working with Aboriginal families and doing a PhD. (Shirley/Nukunu)

I have years of social work in primary health care, including initial implementation of the Closing the Gap Chronic Disease health targets, educating GPs and Allied health staff to understand cultural differences in a sociomedical rather than the generic biomedical model of service. For the past six years I've worked within Aboriginal child protection as part of the SNAICC [Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care] National Family Matters Campaign. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

Libby and I have worked side-by-side with Aboriginal people, in urban, regional and remote communities, in the justice, health and education sectors, with ACCOs, in front-line practice, research, and evaluation. We both continue to learn from our Aboriginal colleagues, coauthors, and extended family members. We are privileged to be Yarning with you. (Helen/ally)

Can I ask you a question that sits well with decolonising social work? Who has a social work degree? (Libby/ally)

All of the experience that I've had over time, including all the learning with frameworks and theories, would equate to a social work degree. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

There is an argument about cultural and clinical knowledge, what is important and what's not important for professional recognition. We know that across all sectors in Australia this conversation is being had, that if you don't have a degree, then the clinical perspective trumps anything over culture. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Like Charmayne, I am not a qualified social worker. I have lived experience, learnt work skills, and cultural understandings that support my employment roles. I've attempted to gain tertiary qualifications; however, academia is founded on white ways of knowing and doing, so I became extremely frustrated and offended. I didn't stay for the duration. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

What I'm hearing, is the recognition of skills and experience against a western framework, rather than positioning the eligibility as a social worker based on the wealth of knowledge, experience, and understanding for social work practice. Qualification is misaligned in that way. (Helen/ally)

Yes, a degree. That's words on paper … there was a lack of opportunity back in my time. We lived out bush. As if we could do a degree! (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

Let's face it. We only just stopped being taken in the 1970s. We weren't even allowed into places because of colour and racism. The AASW [Australian Association of Social Work] is systematically clamping down on using the title Social Worker unless you've done the degree. It doesn't address historical barriers preventing getting a degree. (Shirley/Nukunu)

We all had to upskill back in the 1980s as Aboriginal people to work alongside non-Aboriginal staff members with qualifications, to do what Aboriginal social workers do without that piece of paper. It was a back-hander. You got Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing, but cannot formally be acknowledged for it. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

> By not recognising our ways of knowing, being, and doing, it stops the arguments over cultural versus clinical to suggest what is important in social work. Aboriginal people now go to university. It is not to get "highfalutin" jobs, but jobs to give back to their own communities. That doesn't mean that you gotta have a bit of paper. The social work degree is a door opener. In this non-Aboriginal society, we are told what we need to have and what we need to do. (Shirley/Nukunu)

> I've worked in places where you cannot apply for a cultural consultant position unless you have a social work degree. You have the lived experience. Non-Aboriginal staff consult with you all the time. Your cultural loading is huge, but you are not worth being a paid consultant. Yet, you do it every day anyway. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

> I am fortunate my organisation did not apply the formal qualification requirement to their cultural consultants' roles, back in 2015. As far as I'm aware, none of the three consultants held tertiary qualifications. Interesting, as our role was to inform the Youth Court Judges and Magistrates of cultural concerns or voids in the Department for Child Protection's applications to remove Aboriginal children and young people from caregivers. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

> In your workforce experiences, cultural knowledge was colonised by other people who then use your knowledge. But you're not regarded yourself for your own knowledge. (Helen/ally)

> That's right, exactly. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

> How do you decolonise something so deeply entrenched in disrespect? (Helen/ally)

> I think about decolonising social work. There needs to be space for Aboriginal people to say how it is for us and to understand the mainstream idea of what social work means. As Aboriginal social workers we are measured by that in some way, but can't get jobs unless with a social work degree … It is very hard when you sit in an institution created by non-Aboriginal people and that silences Aboriginal voices. There is not much written in Aboriginal research spaces, so we have to build off something that is not really there and justify why our knowledge system is important. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Western social work education is situated in historical structures that denied Aboriginal people opportunity and access to higher education. There was no place for Aboriginal people to be professionally regarded for their ways of knowing, being, and doing. Without a social work degree, Aboriginal ways risk being subjected to colonisation by non-Aboriginal social workers undertaking so-called culturally competent practice (Dickson, 2020; Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2019). With caution, our use of Dadirri was to help the non-Aboriginal authors to avoid continuation of the same-old colonising practices.

Learning Social Work Together

> Universities are created by white people for white people. (Shirley/Nukunu)

> Most definitely! The way that you [non-Aboriginal people] learn is not in the way that I would learn. I learn by doing. I learn by seeing. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

> I absolutely agree, University is a white construct founded upon whiteness theories and ideologies. I was really offended when submitting assignments based upon my own

experiences. I had to reference someone else's work, usually non-First Nations people, so I could validate my own experiences. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

Once again, Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing are not valued. (Libby/ally)

I learn by doing, I learn by seeing, then implementing. I've learned so much over my lifetime. I'm doing a full-time course, while working full time. It's probably a little different for the generation of today, but I still don't think the systems are built for the way Aboriginal people learn. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

We are light-years behind. What you are saying, Charmayne, is absolutely right. Our young people benefited from those before us, and who fought for us. It is not that those things were not afforded to us. We just weren't allowed to go to university. (Shirley/Nukunu)

If an Aboriginal person went to Year 12, back in my day, it was like "Oh they're big, they're flash". Actually, not many Aboriginal people went to Year 12. Not many Aboriginal people were encouraged past Year 10. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

From my experience, Aboriginal students still struggle with getting through the system. The way social work is taught is not acknowledging culture, students' backstories, and lived experiences outside of university. (Libby/ally)

This is not how we learn, mate! We learn better with other people in a collective system of support. Universities with Aboriginal specific units allow Aboriginal students to come together, learn together, talk together, have Aboriginal facilitators, and be able to go away and work in our communities. We need conversations that support our learning, and the idea we can all succeed. Clearly, university is not designed for maximum benefit for Aboriginal people. This is really sad because we are not "dumb fellas". We are actually clever. We just do things in different ways. We have collectivism. It's about us doing education together, as a journey. It involves learning as a group of people. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Perfectly stated, Shirley! (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

How does Aboriginal ways of learning work in university settings? (Libby/ally)

We work together to get assignments written. When somebody was not feeling confident, we had no problem getting on the phone going, "This assignment is doing my head in. This is what I'm thinking. Am I on the right track?". If we couldn't work it out between us, we got on the phone to our lecturers. We supported one another. The level of achievement was astounding. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Hearing you, Shirley, that's the way I learn. Why aren't we doing that for everyone? (Helen/ally)

It is probably frowned upon … an Aboriginal colleague and I were doing similar work and we wanted to write a PhD together. Together, we made this really full picture around what we thought. What she didn't have, I had. What I didn't have, she had. I asked, "Can you write a PhD in tandem with somebody?". We might need more words, or whatever. Together we were powerful. Do you see that idea, as opposed to an individual's ideas, in that we think together? If we're looking at collective society, we would spur each other on. We could have written something phenomenal. Decolonising in this way, a joint PhD in social work would have made my heart absolutely sing. We would have knocked it out of the park. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Tensions with social work education are built upon debates in which Aboriginal social workers' cultural expertise, lifelong, and workplace training is not formally recognised. Forced to undertake western university studies to pursue employment, often for working with their own communities, is not designed for how Aboriginal people learn. The ways that First Nations people learn are not deficit approaches (Terare & Harris, 2022), nor is a cultural approach nonprofessional social work.

For the authors of this article, there is an additional layer of colonising power. Social work recently became a registered profession in South Australia, where this Yarn took place. Regulatory mechanisms, once established, will prohibit the Aboriginal authors from using the title "Social Worker". The relevant legislation has power to define what constitutes social work and this will arguably legitimise new forms of colonisation.

Valuing of Culture Informing Social Work Practice

> If you don't have a degree, then the clinical perspectives trump anything over culture. How can you have a clinical perspective if you can't look at culture? (Shirley/Nukunu)

> I absolutely agree, Shirley. The generic biomedical, clinical models are not effective for people requiring sociomedical service models. I find the same in child protection where cultural harm is not a consideration in the care and protection of First Nations children. Culture is central to identity. Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value, and what is important to us. Every area of human development, which defines the child's best interest, has a cultural component. Your culture helps define how you attach, how you express emotion, how you learn, and how you stay healthy. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

> Decolonising is about listening to the person's story. If, for example, we were thinking about keeping children safe, then we also need to keep parents safe. Their story is important, but it is not necessarily the story you hear first in social work. When you get a referral, you are hearing someone else's interpretation, they put Aboriginal people into a box and it's not the real story. That box is really hard to work within. It does not represent what they or their family are needing or wanting, nor is it supporting their story. We need to start again and prioritise culturally-informed social work practice. "Family led" is the most important part of decolonising social work. Getting their narrative is extremely important. Would you agree, Shirley? (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

> Yes! Being assessed by people who don't think, know, and be in the same way makes room for misunderstanding. You are being assessed by somebody else's way of knowing, being, and doing. Non-Aboriginal people don't know where to look to find strength in culture. They struggle to locate a cultural conversation and focus on what they think is clinical. Therefore, culture is rarely seen or brought into the way social workers construct ideas about what is happening for Aboriginal families. I absolutely agree with what Charmayne is saying. It must be assessment by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people. (Shirley/Nukunu)

> I agree, assessments for First Nations children and families must align to First Nations values, not the current white values that are applied and which underpin so much of the intergenerational chronic collective traumas we are still living with to this present day—that underpins the disproportionate rates of our children in nonkinship out of home care and our incarceration rates. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

Aboriginal families have been disempowered by every sector, whether it's government services, nongovernment services, or ACCOs. Policies and procedures of organisations do not fit the way Aboriginal people do business. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

Here's the problem. A model is developed that is known not to be culturally appropriate, yet social workers take that model because they like it. They then apply it to Aboriginal people. There is always going to be this misalignment around Aboriginal cultural ideas and this idea of clinical practice, but they can be one in the same as culture weaves throughout everything. There are not enough Aboriginal people writing, by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. The problem with assessments is that if you can't see it [e.g., non-Aboriginal social workers], how can you write about it. So having ways that we know, be, and do, are incredibly important to what we bring to social work. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Yes! I always make a point of explaining that culturally appropriate is not the same as culturally valid or culturally effective, which is required when working in a culturally safe model for First Nations peoples. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

I'm a big storyteller, it's how I get my point across. I listened to a podcast recently about an Aboriginal man telling his story about his fractured spirit. He had been to psychologists and psychiatrists. They prescribed him different types of medication. The man said that he felt like his spirit was shattered. He decided that he needed to go home, to get well, and to heal his shattered spirit. The psychiatrist tried to convince him to not go off of the medication, to stay and have more therapy. The Aboriginal man went against the advice and went home. He just needed to get his feet in the dirt and be at home to heal. This is not the western style of therapy. I do it at least three times a year, just so that my spirit can come back together. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

So, that sense of wellbeing. (Helen/ally)

Most definitely. That is not taught, but it is extremely important. You can imagine how many families, parents and children, grandparents, and so forth, that their spirits are all fractured. They have never been afforded the opportunity to be able to go home, because home is nowhere for them. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

How do we do that when we remove children and place them into non-Aboriginal placements? How do you explain to a non-Aboriginal person that the child needs to go home to country? Organisations go to non-Aboriginal psychiatrists or psychologists and spend thousands of dollars for therapy for an Aboriginal child. They would never see the kid because they would not engage with them. It is not until the kid does something that is concerning will they think, "Shirley is an Aboriginal social worker, let's ring her and chat to her". The reality is, even though I have a degree, I will never stand in an equal place with those people, even as a professional in my own right with many years of experience both culturally and clinically, I'm still seen to not have the appropriate qualification to work with my own community. (Shirley/Nukunu)

I fully agree, Shirley. Even with a degree, Aboriginal ways of knowing and doing in relation to cultural elements are not valued in mainstream systems. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

Even with a degree you are not seen to have ideas about wellness that are regarded. There are cultural responses that we can access, and Aboriginal kids cannot access when not seen as a legitimate knowledge system or legitimate therapy. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Generally, policies stop us from doing a lot of things that we would normally, or naturally, do. We want to give back to community no matter what educational road we go down. If an

Aboriginal person is asked by a non-Aboriginal colleague for advice like, "how do I do this?" or, "what do I say?", an Aboriginal person will help them because they know that giving knowledge and information will help the Aboriginal person, family, and community. We want to make a difference. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

[The Yarn was silent momentarily.]

Beautiful, Charmayne, I have got many thoughts going through my brain based on what you have just said. Silence is not that we don't know something. It is about the fact that you have blown other peoples' minds and you have given them so much to think about. Silence is giving people time to process what you have said. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Yes, the team I am working in are all Aboriginal staff and we are working in quite a westernised system. I advised them when meeting and talking to families, to not bombard them with too much information. The same in talking about decolonising everything, that is to allow time to process. Having time to reflect on our conversation rather than answering in the moment. I've seen many social workers asking Aboriginal people direct questions like, "How do I know that you are not going to end up in a domestic violent relationship again?". How does anyone know? You can't predict that! (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

Exactly! (Libby/ally)

That direct questioning is connected to trauma and intergenerational trauma. I was working for an organisation and told the manager that I wanted to change the interviewing of new staff. The process was not culturally sensitive. You may be interviewing Aboriginal people that have spirits that are shattered, and you are expecting them to answer questions straight away. I suggested giving interviewees the questions beforehand, then let them tell a story. We interviewed non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people for positions. Two Aboriginal people opted to give a story and were both employed because they did not have to answer direct questions. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

In our stories there is strength and resistance. We have all been subject to colonising practices and we know of ways of doing things differently. What you have done there, Charmayne, is allow people to speak. We do have the answers to practice in different ways. We don't need to interpret or translate. We have an understanding and knowledge that already exists. We don't need to do all those processes that a non-Aboriginal person does. Does that mean we don't practice in fabulous ways? No, it doesn't. We practice in ways that our families need us to. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Another story is about an Aboriginal worker who shared some of her own story with a client. The client was quite enthralled with the worker's story and enjoyed knowing more about her. I had the senior manager ring me and say, "Your staff member shared her own story with the client. It is really inappropriate, unprofessional, and we never want to see that again". I said, "With all due respect, that is how Aboriginal business is done. If we cannot share our stories with our clients, we are never going to have our client believe we are doing the right thing by them because we all have got a story". The senior manager took that on board, and she understood, and she has never stopped anyone again to my knowledge. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

That's a really interesting story, Charmayne. In my life I needed some counselling, and I had seen several counsellors who just didn't feel right for me. Finally, I found an Aboriginal narrative therapist who counselled me for four years—the reason she felt right for me was she shared her own story with me along the way! (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

Again, another system that says your way of knowing does not lead to a professional way of doing things. Within culture, it is the way that we do business. We don't go to you thinking

> that we are above you. We go with the notion that we are going to walk a journey with you. This whole idea of professional or not professional is a colonising process. We have different relationships with our families than mainstream workers do, because often clients are related to us, or we know them. If you go with your position and not your story, then you will be shut off because that is not an Aboriginal way of knowing, being, or doing. (Shirley/Nukunu)

Our Yarn reinforced that cultural and clinical practice can and must coexist, but the Eurocentric constructions of knowledge has created hierarchies that continue to disrupt holistic social work practice. When initial intervention failed to consult Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing, the western solution was, "Let's go get Shirley". Engaging Aboriginal social workers from the onset is needed. Instead, "allowing" Aboriginal social workers to do their work only when western methods fail has remained discursively strong.

Renarrating our Yarning

Pollard et al. (2020) summarised key themes that emerged in their Yarn. They spent time building relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal allies, inviting others along the way into their circle of trust. We, as authors, likewise took time to build relationships and bring in trusted others to Yarn about social work. In the threads of our Yarn, Aboriginal authors' voices were prioritised. Non-Aboriginal authors walked alongside, as allies, majorly silent but listening deeply.

> Can we get to the point where decolonisation of social work is truly possible, which would involve non-Aboriginal social workers taking the backseat? (Helen/ally)

> Yes, walk alongside us as allies, until we get the gist of what we are doing. Then allow us to take the lead and let us utilise our knowledge systems. If we say this works for our families, then let us do that. If we have a different way of doing something, don't then say that this is not appropriate. Seek to understand why it is important to us. (Shirley/Nukunu)

> Be curious about what the differences are. Trust and respect the fact that we know what we are doing. That is extremely important. We are challenged every day in our thoughts and our actions because we are using a western framework that doesn't fit. Allyship is extremely important as we cannot do it alone. There are not enough of us to do it alone. Working together and trusting that we know what we are doing. Don't try to make us fit into a box that doesn't fit our community. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

> Decolonising to me is turning things on their head and being able to see things from a different context. It is about being able to practice in ways that Aboriginal people naturally would practice and accepting that there is a different way of knowing, being, and doing. (Shirley/Nukunu)

> Social work has historically been, "We have the knowledge, and you have to do what you are told". I created all the services from the ground up so that each service has that very, very strong cultural alignment, which is really important. Including collective voices can create services in a way that takes funded service agreements and makes them into living services to fit Aboriginal families and their children. We have turned things on its head, and we are saying that this person has a story, and they are the expert. (Charmayne/Malyangapa-Barkindji)

> We know that we have many people involved and many opportunities for wisdom and knowledge. We have people pulling us into line. We do not need someone else or the system to dictate. We have people who will do that because they love and care for us, and they want the best for us and their children. (Shirley/Nukunu)

> Again, I fully agree with Shirley and Charmayne's statements. (Joanne/Ngarrindjeri)

> As Maylea (2020) wrote, "social work is weak and divided, riven with internal disagreement. Externally, capitalism marches on, entrenching inequality, while powerful institutions out-manoeuvre social justice" (p. 775). Divisions among social workers stifle decolonising social work and inhibit advancements in understanding.

Final Yarn (Conclusion)

We emphasise that social work needs to incorporate First Nations people's ways of knowing, being, and doing. Students need social work education to respect the ways in which people learn, and cultural and clinical practice can and must coexist. Muller (2016) stressed that when social work eventually gets "it right for Indigenous Australians", we "will get it right when working with anyone" (p. 67).

As a collective, we agree with this final statement:

> To decolonise, we need to have a good hard look at how social work currently operates. We have to do things differently. I would like you [non-Aboriginal social workers] to help us to write our own frameworks and help us to administer those frameworks. Make the way for us to write our own pieces of legislation, policies, and practices. Stand there with us and be our ally. Be our brothers and sisters in this journey. If we take away the power of an oppressive system and ask social workers to do something different, it is a very big job. We need to train Aboriginal staff, have a good educational stream, and arm them, bring the right people, right resources, and knowledge. Make a way for us, buffer and support, then let us go! It takes more than just writing something in the preamble of our code of ethics, but it is a completely different thing to do something different. I think that is the challenge! (Shirley/Nukunu)

In conclusion, we have centrally positioned the Aboriginal authors' voices, which is the strength of this article. We have done so through the sharing of stories and visions related to decolonising social work. We shared our insights that First Nations social workers are still waiting to be trusted by non-Aboriginal people; trust to lead and undertake culturally informed clinical practice. In our Yarning we expressed that First Nations social work students need to learn in their own cultural ways. Engaging shared narratives, involving Yarning style learning and teaching could be integrated into social work pedagogy to enhance social work education and practice. Yarning, as a way of learning in social work education, is a good place to start.

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