

Cheryl Axleby

Connecting to families and community

Cheryl Axleby is a proud Narungga woman and has held the role of Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement since 2012. Throughout her career, Cheryl has worked to promote social justice and inclusion of Aboriginal people and perspectives throughout the community and Government.

As the eldest of three girls, with both parents working, Cheryl held a position of responsibility in her family to care for her sisters. As a Narungga woman, Cheryl's family are from the Yorke Peninsula with generations living at Point Pearce. Cheryl has fond memories of spending school holidays there on what they called the 'home station' fishing, rabbiting, bringing up baby galahs and learning about culture. Cheryl has always walked in two worlds and values the unconditional acceptance and safety she has felt from her Aboriginal world, connection to country and people.

Despite enjoying her early learning, Cheryl left school at 16 having faced racism from both peers and teachers throughout her schooling and enrolled in a secretarial college under an Aboriginal scholarship, that offered specific classes for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women.

Cheryl and her partner Pat purchased their home at Paradise in 1993 as it was close to the city and O Bahn. Both of Cheryl's sons attended the Campbelltown Public Schools and had employment as teenagers locally.

One son is now a butcher and the other an Aboriginal youth worker.

Cheryl's working career commenced at 17 years old as a file clerk with the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement (ALRM). Cheryl then worked extensively in the areas of justice, social inclusion, child protection and training. Cheryl's time at ALRM as an Aboriginal field officer supporting lawyers and community members to understand the legal system and support adult and young offenders led her to train as a paralegal.

In 2012 Cheryl returned to ALRM as the CEO. She has held the role of chair of the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Legal Services for 6 years and is currently a national co-chair with the Change the Record Coalition, which is the first Aboriginal led social justice body, raising awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in the legal system. A significant focus has been to raise the age of criminal responsibility from aged 10 to 14 and provide a non-criminal approach to the management of youth, reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the justice system and to reduce family violence.

Alongside her working roles, Cheryl has also supported community sport as her boys were growing up and volunteered on the Campbelltown Council Reconciliation Advisory Committee.

Cheryl hopes there will be greater inclusivity and highlighting of Aboriginal people in Campbelltown and their contributions. She would love to see more local Aboriginal artists and their artwork being displayed and information about Campbelltown's Aboriginal history being more readily available and celebrated.

Cheryl especially acknowledges her parents as wonderful role models, her sisters for always being there, her incredibly supportive partner Patrick and her children, Matt and Shannon, all who have supported her throughout her life journey.

"We need to support Aboriginal people with further training and development in management to run their own organisations."

Celebrating International Women's Day with the Women of Campbelltown project – inspiring stories of local women, their achievements and contributions to the Community'.

Thank you to the women who participated and the volunteer interviewers Di Booker and Katrina Spencer for their time.