Deep Listening and Learning with Aboriginal Prisoners: Insights into Culture, Connection and the Transformative Power of Art

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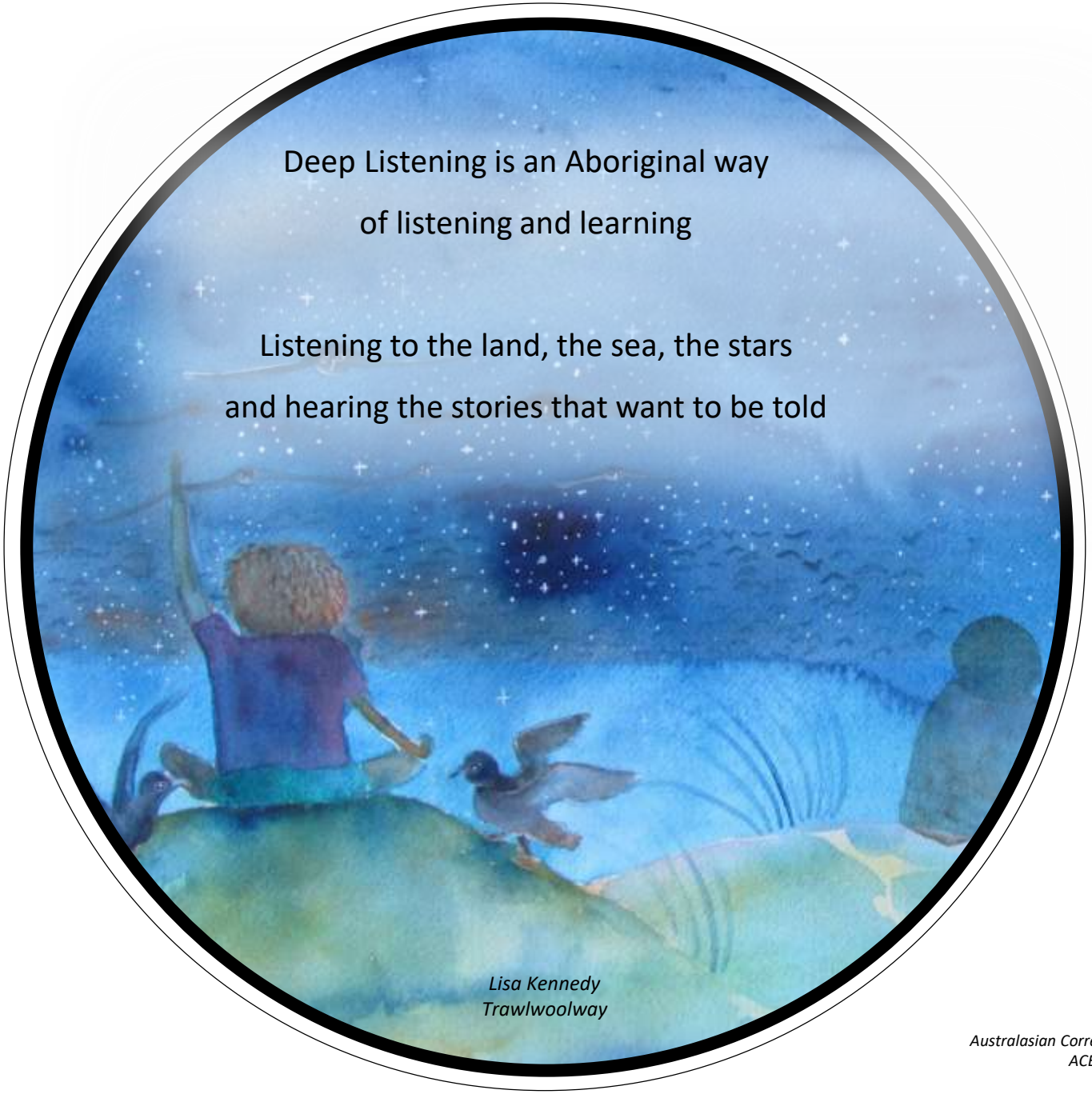
Australasian Corrections Education Association
ACEA Conference Canberra 2017

We acknowledge the Elders past and present
who have supported and encouraged our work
from the beginning
We also acknowledge the Ancestors,
Guardians and Spirits of the Land on which we live
for their inspiration and protection
Lisa Kennedy
Trawlwoolway


Deep Listening is an Aboriginal way
of listening and learning
Listening to the land, the sea, the stars
and hearing the stories that want to be told
Lisa Kennedy
Trawlwoolway

Messages and Artworks from Aboriginal Prisoners

Koori Cultural Centre

Hopkins Correctional Centre

Ararat, Victoria, Australia

Australasian Corrections Education Association
ACEA Conference Canberra 2017

The following messages have emerged from the prisoners' artworks and in response to messages sent from members of the Koori Cohort at Federation University

The Koori Cultural Centre is …

A place of identity where we can feel safe

A pure place without the outside pressures

Where we connect with the air, with the earth and the birds

Especially the local magpies, a symbol of our culture

They talk to us, to say “You are not alone, we are here too”

A place of respect from others including teachers

A place where we can interact

A great pride of place

Our place

Koori Cultural Centre Community

Thomas

I have a toolbox
Which is full of messages
They are gems like diamonds
Each gem is a spiritual message
Like a message stick
Bill

Bushka

Culture is …
Family
Friends
Honour
Respect
Michael

Clancy Littledoo Wildfella

We are all artists, musicians, painters, dancers
We use sacred language
We all have a story to tell
Bushka

Tim

When I make art

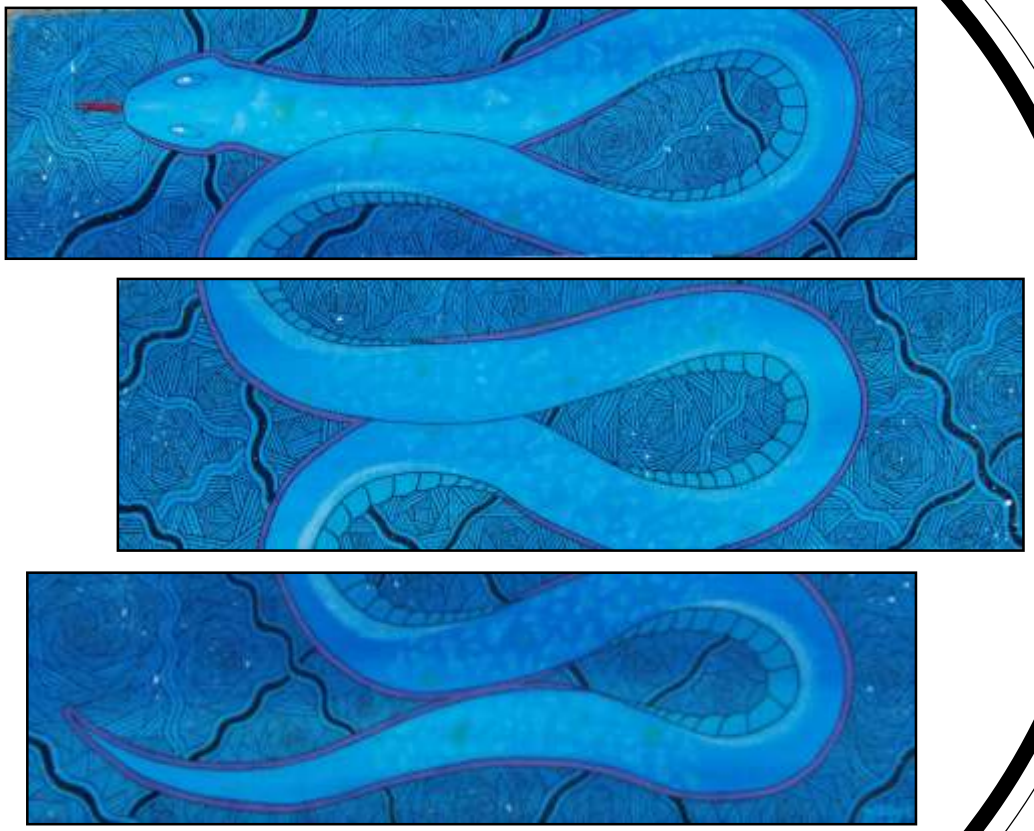
I feel relaxed

Sometimes my artwork shows me a story

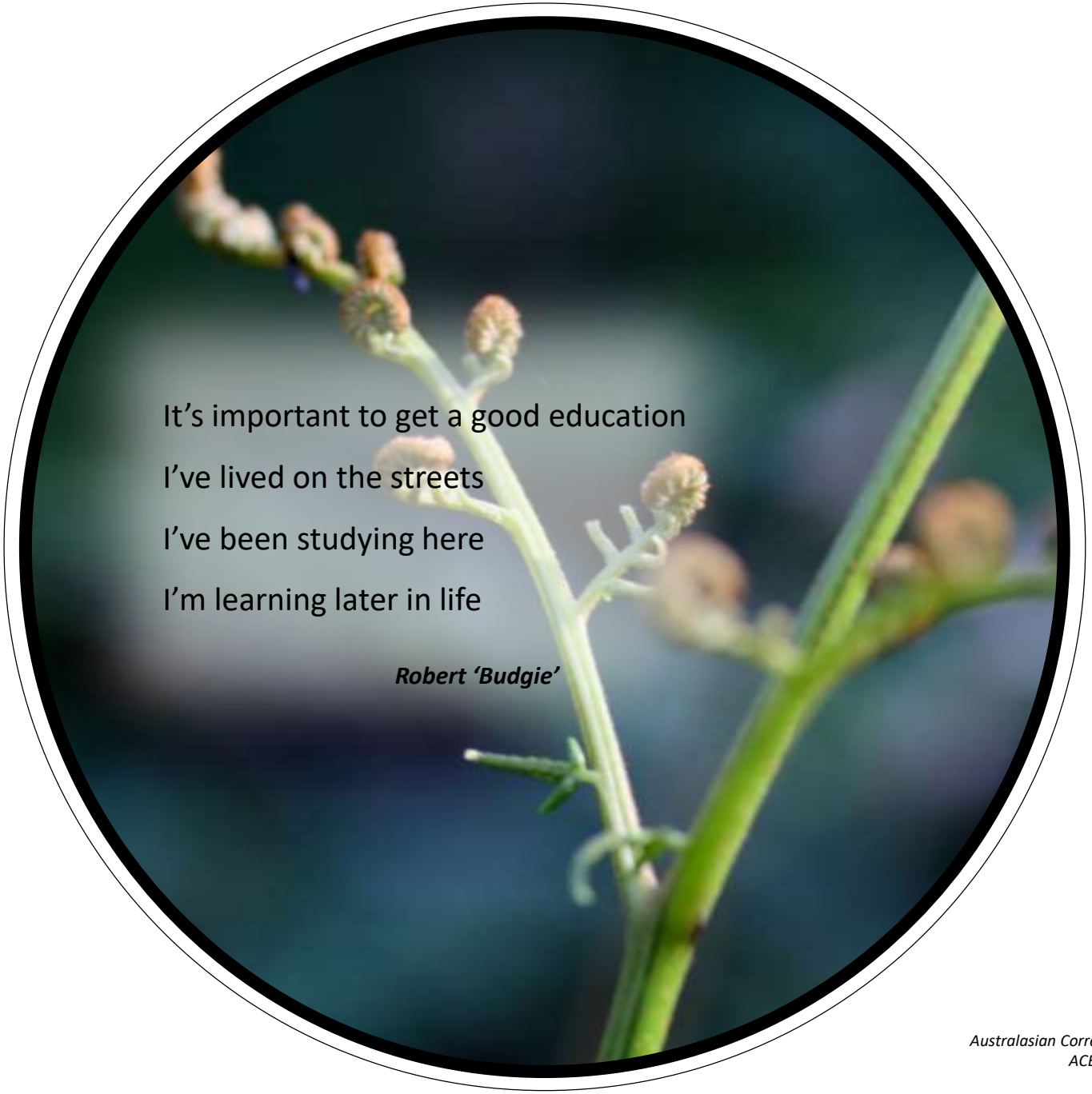
That I didn’t know was there

My art-making helps me feel connected

Thomas



Mick


It’s important to get a good education
I’ve lived on the streets
I’ve been studying here
I’m learning later in life
Robert ‘Budgie’

Steven

I am now not the same person

I will never go back to the other person

I will never reoffend

I now have a sense of belonging

With a real sense of strength in identity and knowledge

With a real connect to my spiritual and Indigenous side

Dave

James

Show respect to the community that you've hurt
It can take years for someone to forgive you
But you've got to forgive yourself too
Theodore

Mick

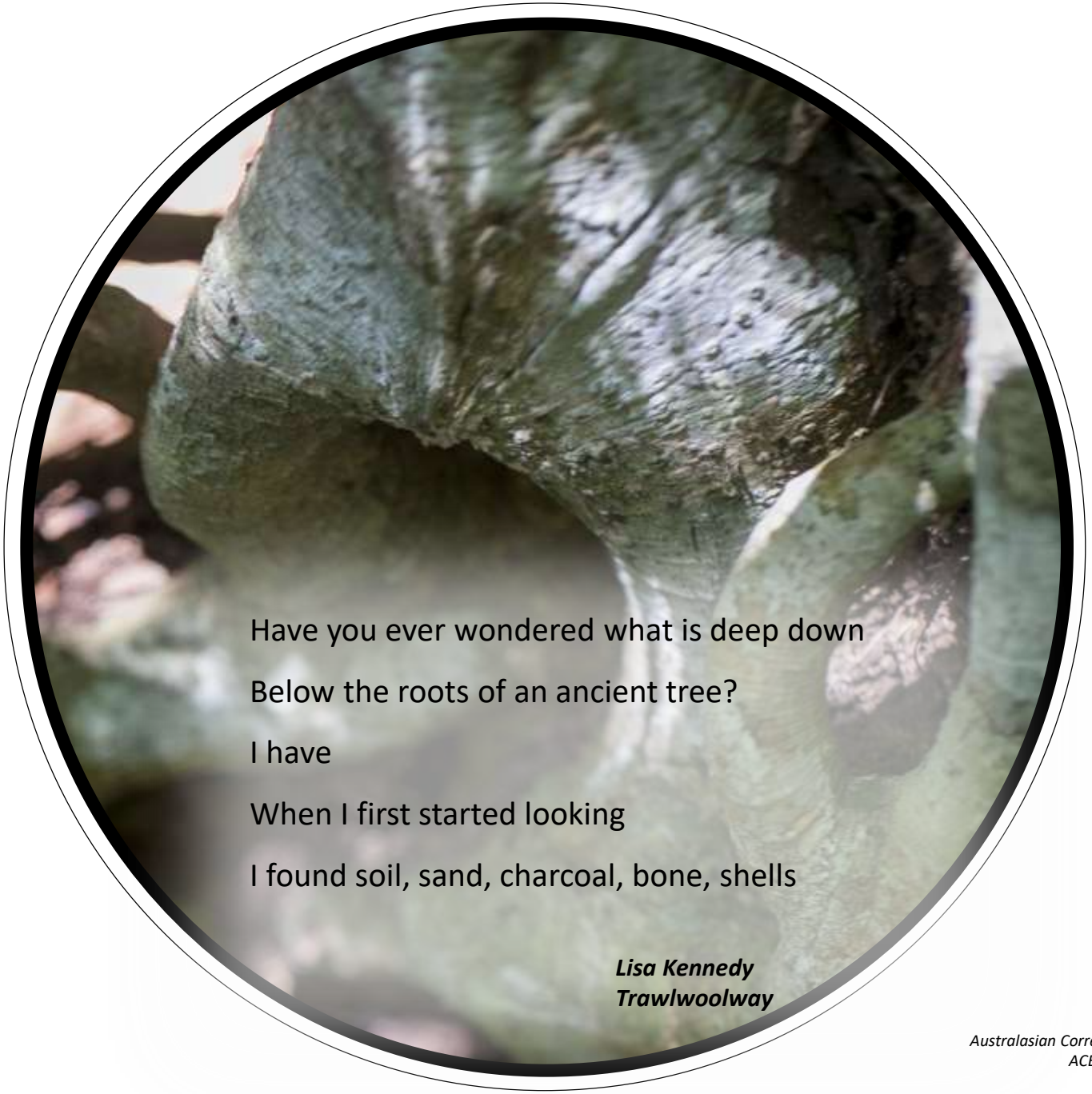
My son is ten and he's good at drawing
When I get out, I'm going to pass on
What I am learning now to my son
The line is going to stay strong
Steven

Messages from The Koori Cohort

Federation University Australia
Gippsland Campus

Australasian Corrections Education Association
ACEA Conference Canberra 2017

Lisa Kennedy
Trawlwoolway



Have you ever wondered what is deep down

Below the roots of an ancient tree?

I have

When I first started looking

I found soil, sand, charcoal, bone, shells

Lisa Kennedy
Trawlwoolway

Lisa Kennedy
Trawlwoolway

I found an underground river
Which was flowing up into its roots
It is this river which flows through me
It has been there all my life
Lisa Kennedy
Trawlwoolway

I am not just painting Country
I am painting about Country
I am painting with Country
Uncle Dennis Seymour
86 year old Elder
South Australia

The Elders' stories hold culture
And keep it alive and fresh
Dreamtime is not a fairy tale
Rather, it is life itself
Uncle Dennis Seymour
86 year old Elder
South Australia

The power of stories carries a living history

Stories create unwritten cultural history

Stories maintain a culture

Culture is linked by stories

This is how the Dreamtime works

Uncle Dennis Seymour
86 year old Elder
South Australia

Ronald Edwards
GunaiKurnai

The world needs people who are ready

To listen and learn about culture

We need to understand each other culturally

Ronald Edwards
GunaiKurnai

Ronald Edwards
GunaiKurnai

Mick Harding
Taungwurrung

Everything speaks to us
It reminds us
Bunjil's law still exists
Mick Harding
Taungwurrung

Art helps me to understand
Art helps me to heal
Art shows that we're still here
Mick Harding
Taungwurrung

Inside Out Dreaming Messages

Deep Listening Circle

Post Office Gallery Ballarat

Australasian Corrections Education Association
ACEA Conference Canberra 2017

Gary

Thank you so much for sharing
your beautiful artwork with us
Deep Listening Circle Participant

Your words connected us as we sat in a circle
and allowed us to tell our stories
Deep Listening Circle Participant

It was deeply moving to hear your voices speaking through the words written in the Listening Circle cards

It has given me a deeper understanding of Country

Deep Listening Circle Participant

Thank you for your paintings,
your creativity and inspiration
and your respect for the Elders
Deep Listening Circle Participant

Your words remind us
of where we have come from
Deep Listening Circle Participant

Messages from Women Prisoners

Massachusetts Correctional Institution

Framingham USA

Message Exchange Facilitators

Prof Andre de Quadros
Adjunct Prof Laura Brearley
Assoc Prof Shirley Fraser

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Deborah

As time goes by we are learning

more and more about

the land, the sea and the stars.

Our ancestors, the Aboriginal and tribal people

already have the knowledge of how to use

deep listening to truly hear

what the earth has to say.

Angela

Kate

I am more open
to the unknown
than ever before
Tonieka

Every generation gains heritage
tradition or values from the one before it.
Time is important.
As time goes on
we learn from the people before
and sometimes after us.
Jacki

Looking back at a
tough experience from the perspective
of the present moment means that we have
survived it.
Danielle

Message about Transformation

Don Ahnansisi McIntyre

Ojibway/Algonquin
of the Wolf Clan from
Tamiskaming First Nation

Artist, story-teller, lawyer,
academic, cultural educator

Australasian Corrections Education Association
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The smoke of the fire dances in spirals
That’s how life works
Things need to change
They must
Don Ahnansisi McIntyre

We start as blank canvases
And transform along the way
Don Ahnansisi McIntyre

If we're stuck
We need to move forward
Don Ahnansisi McIntyre

Moth is the transformer
The dark transformer
The Moth Medicine is helping us all to move through
Don Ahnansisi McIntyre

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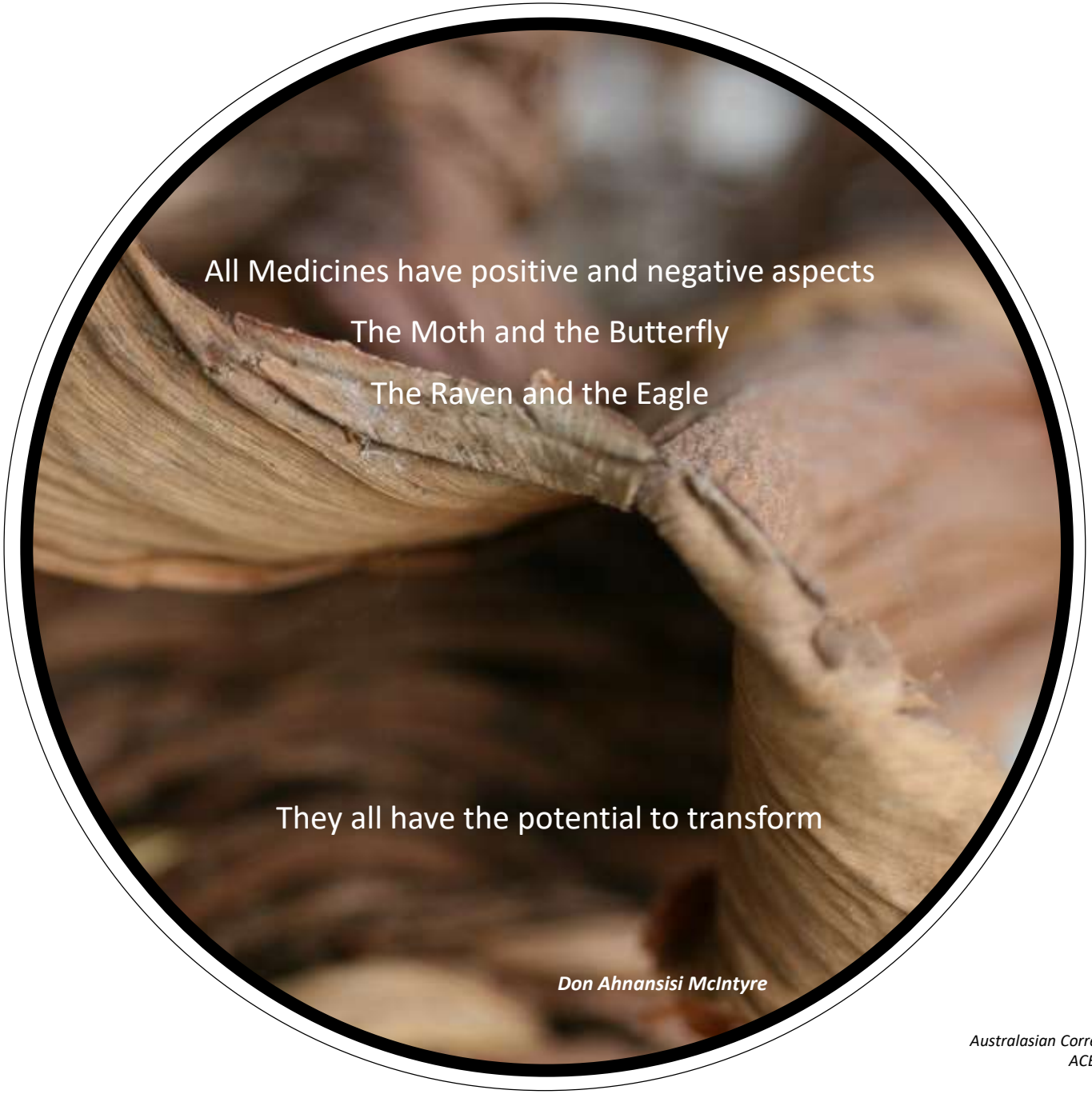

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In the Shadowlands
There are no secrets
Don Ahnansisi McIntyre

Time and space
don’t work in the same way
Everything plays back
into the spiral
Don Ahnansisi McIntyre

There is a point
where it stops being about us
Our work here is connected
to a much larger project
Don Ahnansisi McIntyre