



Aunty Betty Memorial Reconciliation Walk

Celebrate
Enjoy
Watch
Dance

the life of SCRGI Patron Aunty Betty McMahon.
the opening of the SCUH Reconciliation Garden.

sharing of Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi knowledge.
participating in traditional games.

the Gubbi Gubbi dance troupe.
with the troupe.

When: Wednesday, 29 May 2019

Time: 10am to 2pm

Where: Reconciliation Garden
Sunshine Coast University Hospital (SCUH)
Cnr Eccles Blvd and Frazer Lane, Birtinya

Proudly supported by:



A Sunshine Coast Elder's journey

(by Jon Coghill, ABC Sunshine Coast, July 2015)

“Now a prominent advocate of Aboriginal rights on the Sunshine Coast, Elder 'Aunty' Betty McMahon barely admitted she was aboriginal for half her life.”

It was through no fault of her own. As a child in Toowoomba in the 1940s, her mother was encouraged to keep quiet about the family's Aboriginality.

It was an era when her mother was confined to the family home.

“My mother was Aboriginal and when we moved to Toowoomba she wasn't allowed to leave the front gate unless our father was with her,” she said.

Mrs McMahon says her family only discussed their heritage when her grandmother visited from Woorabinda Aboriginal community in central Queensland.

“[That] didn't change till 1967 when [my mother] was allowed to go out on her own to go shopping,” she said.

Rediscovering her heritage

As an adult, Mrs McMahon moved to Brisbane and worked at the Mater Hospital. She married and had children and fell in love with the Sunshine Coast after it became a regular holiday destination for her family from 1956.

At the age of about 40, her teenage children began asking about her heritage, which had been hidden from them ... “I never told the children until they were old enough to understand, simply because we didn't want them to go through what we did when we were teenagers.”

From then on Mrs McMahon began to embrace her heritage.

Local advocate

Since moving to the Sunshine Coast in 1978, she has played a prominent role in the Indigenous community.

“I was here when a group of us set up the Aboriginal housing which was Kabbi Kabbi, we set up the Caloundra Aboriginal Corporation for Youth, the North Coast Aboriginal Community for Health, Kabbarli HACC and I was the Chairperson of the Murri Health Reference Group from 1993 which established the first identified positions for the Sunshine Coast and Caboolture Health Service, we were successful in securing funding for the first Hospital Liaison Officer at Nambour,” she said.

Mrs McMahon currently supports disabled Indigenous people in the region, using art and community service as a form of therapy.

She says while local Aboriginal people are still subject to discrimination, the Sunshine Coast has come a long way in 37 years.

“It's getting better because there are more Aboriginal people coming to the coast than when we first started here, and there are a lot of South Sea Islanders as well,” she said.

“The young ones have to stand up for themselves; the old ones are dying. The young ones have to take over if they want to keep Aboriginal culture going up here.”