



Fresh face on national art scene

A 21-year old Arnhem Land filmmaker with profound hearing loss is one of the fresh faces emerging onto Australia's national art stage. Gutingarra Yunupingu from north-east Arnhem Land, whose first language is Yolngu signing, is believed to be the first Indigenous person with profound deafness to graduate year 12 in the Northern Territory.



Media icon Ita in the fight against the stigma of hearing loss

WA's Ear Science Institute Australia has a new ambassador: Ita Buttrose. "I'm very impressed with the work that the institute does and the fact that World Health Organization has recognised them for the work they do is great."



Sense of Loss

My hearing isn't that bad. Hearing aids will make me look old. They're expensive. I know someone who got them and left them in their top drawer and is better off without them. Sound familiar?

Less hearing = more jail time

There is a direct association between children diagnosed with language impairment through hearing loss at age 5 and later misconduct at age 19. Hearing impairment has become a significant disability in a custodial environment with evidence mounting that it is also an important component of Aboriginal disadvantage.

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The typical path is early onset ear disease > fluctuating hearing in early childhood > language impairment > lower school readiness > less school engagement & participation > 'delinquency' in adolescence > increased risk of engagement in criminal activity.

Aboriginal ear surgeon Dr Kelvin Kong tells the following story: "A guy came in who was 40 and he typifies all that's wrong with ear health. He had what he described as noises in his ears and when we had a look there were maggots in there. This was in Newcastle, this wasn't remote Australia... It's no surprise that as a consequence he couldn't read or write, was unemployed, in and out of prison."



Hearing-impaired Aboriginal people attending court hearings have to second-guess what is being asked or said, letting them admit things they did not do. Suspects are treated as defiant or non-compliant because they didn't respond to directions might simply not have heard them.

Hearing-impaired Aboriginal people are very prone to wrongful convictions. In 1961 a deaf-mute teenager was sentenced to death, but later to life imprisonment, because he made a false confession.

Hearing impairment has become "a significant disability in a custodial environment" with evidence mounting that it is also an important component of Aboriginal disadvantage. Hearing loss is often more common among Aboriginal prisoners than for their non-Aboriginal peers.

Prison guards in the Northern Territory are now carrying amplification devices to deal with prisoners' hearing disabilities. Schools have started introducing surround-sound systems to amplify teachers' voices in the classroom.

Researchers demand greater translation support, such as a "hand talk" (community sign language) translator, an Auslan translator and a cultural advisor.

The high prevalence of hearing loss among Aboriginal children points to it being an important factor in the high rates of abuse of Aboriginal children in Australia, says Damien Howard, psychologist in Darwin specialising in social and justice challenges faced by juveniles with a history of otitis media. No formal research has been done.

A report found in 2015 that 55% of children who received services in 2013/14 suffered from hearing loss.

None of the welfare agencies involved in child protection have any awareness of the [poor ear health] issue, screen children, or consider it in their services or support," said Damien Howard.



Poor diet is one factor for declining ear health. Many Aboriginal families, especially in remote communities, only shop for food once a fortnight or occasionally. They choose food they can keep in the freezer which excludes fresh fruits or vegetables.

When doctors supplied families with subsidised vegetables they watched students' hearing return, to the point that a formerly introduced amplification system could be abandoned, antibiotics cut down, and infections decline.

Edie Wright, a regional consultant for Aboriginal education in the Kimberley, implemented the 'BBC' program. Each morning, the kids would "breathe, blow and cough" and complete a set of exercises to enable postural drainage. "We reduced our ENT [ear, nose and throat] referrals by 70%," she says.

For others, the hearing damage is permanent. They need hearing aids.

Children need to hear well a long time before school starts. The average age of first hearing aid fitting for Aboriginal children is 5 or 6 years, which is very late in relation to speech and language development and school readiness.

Ear health and hearing loss - Creative Spirits:

<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/health/ear-health-and-hearing-loss#toc4>

Media icon Ita Buttrose in the fight against the stigma of hearing loss

Regina Titelius writing for The West Australian



Photo by Mark Metcalfe/Getty Images

One of Australia's leading media icons with an eye for fashion, Ita Buttrose, is now "lending an ear" and her public profile to WA's Ear Science Institute Australia as its new ambassador.

Ms Buttrose, 77, said she was keen to promote the institute which had recently been named by the World Health Organisation as a designated Collaborating Centre for the Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Loss.

The WHO role, one of only six such positions in the world, gives the institute the task of addressing the epidemic of deafness and hearing loss in the Western Pacific region where more than a quarter of the world's population lives.

"I'm very impressed with the work that the institute does and the fact that WHO has recognised them for the work they do is great," Ms Buttrose said.

"My father (Charles Oswald) had hearing loss and so did his mother.

"It's quite prevalent and many people think, 'Oh well, it's just a normal part of ageing', and in many ways it is but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do something about it.

"My father was so stubborn about his hearing loss. We'd have conversations where I'd say something like, 'The sun's out', and he'd say, 'Yes, I missed the bus'. So we'd be having these completely different conversations.

"So I finally told him he needed to get a hearing aid and he'd say, 'Oh I don't want a trumpet', and I'd say that they don't make them like that anymore.

"And then when he finally got a hearing aid he'd complain about all the noise the 'bloody birds' were making. He had a love-hate affair (with his hearing aid) but we were able to have better conversations with him, that's for sure."

Ms Buttrose, who assured fans her hearing was "perfect", said there was still resistance to hearing aids.

"We are an ageing population and the hearing aids nowadays are so small and so much better, they really do make such a difference to people's quality of life," she said.

<https://thewest.com.au/news/health/media-icon-ita-buttrose-lends-an-ear-in-the-fight-against-deafness-ng-b881252408z>

Sense of loss

[Angie Tomlinson](#) for The West Australian



Picture: Getty Images

My hearing isn't that bad. Hearing aids will make me look old. They're expensive. I know someone who got them and left them in their top drawer and is better off without them. Sound familiar?

The list of excuses to not address hearing loss is absurdly long. Yet we are all very happy to wear our glasses. So what's the difference?

Perception and the value we place on hearing play a big part, according to audiologist Brad Hutchinson. “When we think about hearing, we tend to only consider how it allows us access to sound and don’t think about the significant range of other purposes it serves ... connecting us to other people through communication, registering emotions through intonation in speech, enabling us to monitor our environments and detect potential threats like a passing car, and allowing us to appreciate music,” he says.

“If more of us understood the real consequences of even mild hearing loss and the benefits that can be achieved with a well-prescribed hearing device, I don’t think that any of these objections would outweigh the benefits of addressing hearing loss sooner rather than later.”

The upshot, says Ear Science Institute Australia chief executive and UWA adjunct research fellow Sandra Bellekom, is that people on average wait about seven years to do something about their hearing loss.

“There is a stigma that still remains about having hearing loss which is connected to thoughts about ageing — which people may or may not feel comfortable about,” she says. “It is also connected to disability, people don’t want to admit that something is wrong and many people don’t feel that it is a problem for them — it’s a problem for the people around them but not for them personally.”

Glasses are also considered fashionable, something to be associated with intelligence. Hearing aids — not so much.

New research connecting hearing loss and dementia risk can quickly put our complacency into perspective. A recent Lancet Commission report states while 65 per cent of dementia is likely determined by our genes, 35 per cent is thought to be preventable. Hearing loss represents 9 per cent of the modifiable risk for developing dementia, making it the single biggest preventable contributing factor.

Ms Bellekom says not addressing hearing loss has also been linked to increased anxiety, loneliness and frailty, as well as the potential to be more depressed and isolated. There is also cognitive load and the pure exhausting effort it requires to listen.

If a person has waited years when they finally trial hearing aids the auditory cortex of their brain — which has been deprived of the full volume and frequency of stimulation — is initially overwhelmed by the amplified sound. It takes time for the brain to acclimatise and requires the wearer to persevere. The right person to fit the right hearing aids, accurate technology for the hearing assessment and fitting, and counselling about what to expect can ensure aids don’t get thrown in the drawer.

<https://thewest.com.au/lifestyle/health-wellbeing/sense-of-loss-ng-b881234434z>



Network Conference - August 2019 Gold Coast

UsherKids Australia is to be part of the Deafblind International Usher Syndrome Network Conference on 11 and 12 August 2019 on the Gold Coast.

The program includes people from all areas of the Usher community covering medical research, psychology, employment, communication and social fields and is suitable for professionals, families and adults with Usher syndrome.

- Hollie Feller – UsherKids Australia & Genetic Cures Australia "Helping Bridge the Gap Between Children and Adults with Usher Syndrome"
- Professor John Griggs Head of Ophthalmology at The University of Sydney's Save Sight Institute "Evaluating Biomarkers in Usher Syndrome: Identifying Outcome Measures for Trials"
- Chloe Joyner Usher Kids UK (via video link) "Connecting Usher Kids in the UK"
- Dr Tina Lamey, Australian Inherited Retinal Disease Registry and DNA Bank, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital- Centre for Ophthalmology and Visual Science, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, UWA "Usher Syndrome: Genetics, Personalised Medicine and the Australian Usher Project"
- Dr Nicole Lo-A-Njoe-Kort "Research and Patient Collaboration"
- Alana Roy Psychologist, Mental Health Social Worker, Counsellor and Advocate and Dr Annmaree Watharow General Practitioner with Usher syndrome Type 2 "Better Practice in the Real World"
- Emily Shepard, UsherKids Australia "Helping Children with Usher Syndrome Thrive"
- Moa Wahlqvist PhD Disability science, Researcher at the Audiological research centre, Örebro University hospital "Current Research and Previous Studies - The Importance of Interdisciplinary Studies in Health and Usher Syndrome"
- Jennifer Weir Role Model as a professional working with Usher Syndrome Type 2 "Getting on with Life"
- Christopher Woodfill Associate Executive Director Helen Keller National Center "The Five Pillars of Well-Being for Deafblind"

To register or to find out more, go to <https://event.icebergevents.com.au/dbi-2019/program>

Arnhem Land filmmaker inspired by connections with family

By [Alexia Attwood](#) for ABC News



Photo: Gutingarra Yunupingu is a finalist at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards. (Supplied: The Mulka Project)

A 21-year old Arnhem Land filmmaker with profound hearing loss is one of the fresh faces emerging onto Australia's national art stage.

Gutingarra Yunupingu from north-east Arnhem Land, whose first language is Yolngu signing, is believed to be the first Indigenous person with profound deafness to graduate year 12 in the Northern Territory. Gutingarra spent several years doing work experience at the Buku-Larrgay Mulka Centre, an Indigenous community-controlled art centre in north-east Arnhem Land. He was employed by the centre straight after graduating high school.

Gutingarra began by shooting and editing cultural events and ceremonies, but soon moved to making more concept-driven stylised films, many of which are digital self-portraits. Fast becoming a prolific filmmaker, he said he was inspired by Yolngu culture, dancing, singing and ceremony.

"My film is about my connections with family, with all my relatives, everyone," he said.

The centre's art coordinator, Will Stubbs, said Yolngu culture compels people to share and pass on cultural knowledge.

"These young people are doing it because they're driven to communicate culturally and because it is inherent given that all humans are family that we treat each other in that familial way and share everything we have," Mr Stubbs said.



Photo: Gutingarra Yunupingu's first language was Yolgnu sign language. (Supplied: The Mulka Project)

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-07/gutingarra-yunupingu-marlene-rubuntja-art-awards-indigenous-nt/11285352>

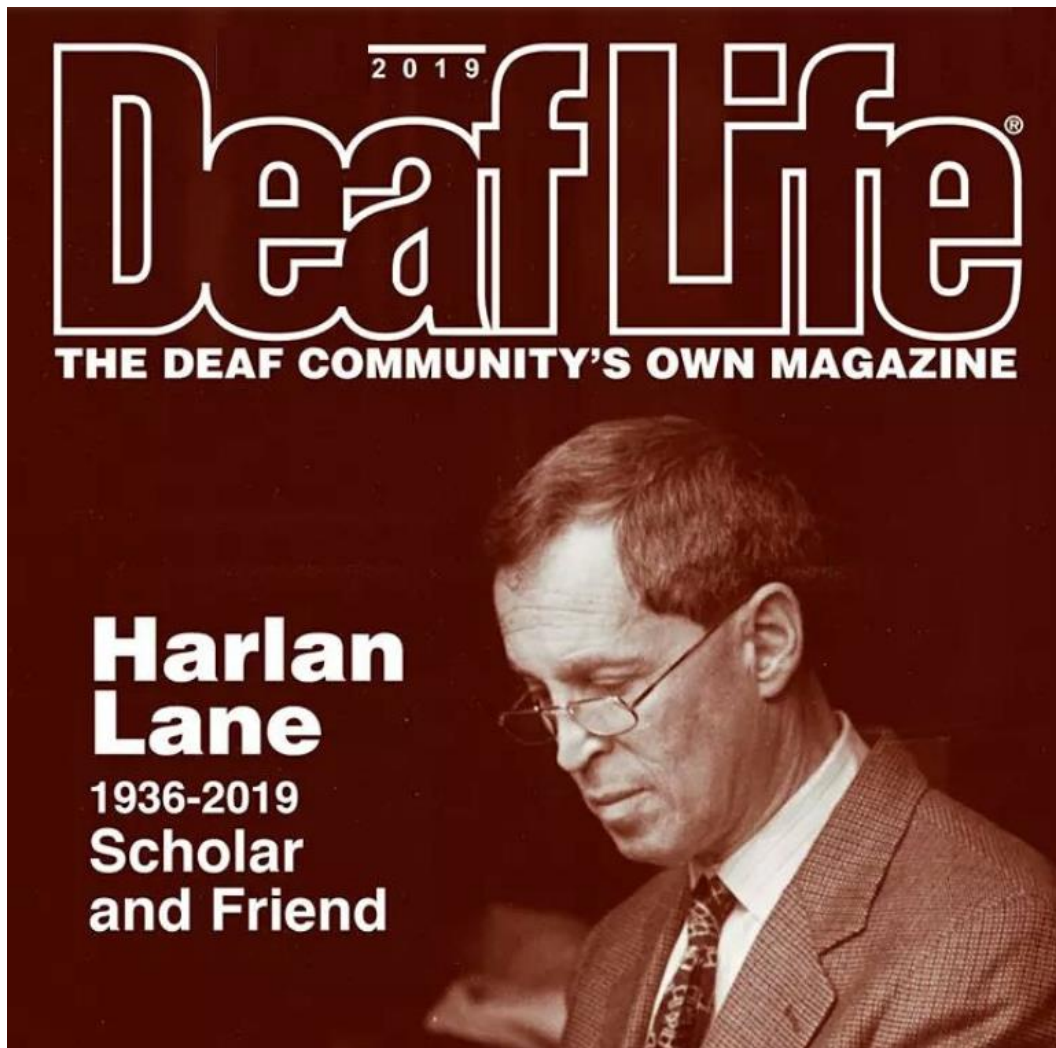
Why we need universal design

Michael Nesmith is a deaf and native American Sign Language speaker working as a creative designer. Throughout his career, Michael's visual/conceptual way of thinking and problem solving have served him both as an asset and a challenge. He finds solutions around his disability through Universal Design.

Michael was born into a deaf-culture family using American Sign Language as the primary language. He attended Gallaudet University (an all-deaf college) later studied visual communication design. He is now a visual designer at Amazon. Throughout his career, Michael's visual/conceptual way of thinking has served him both as an asset and a challenge.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVdPNWWMGyZY&fbclid=IwAR2y3NdBMULvJxtpj0PDKPi9iB7CKD2nM4YAR5-fhE8tc-XpnTSDyXIDmfs>



One of the most significant academic contributors to the Deaf studies field died on 13 July 2019.

American, Harlan Lane was a Distinguished University Professor at Northeastern University, Boston; psychologist and a linguist who investigated the distinctive language and culture of the deaf community.

An interpreter of the deaf experience to the general hearing public, Lane had written *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf* (1984) and *The Deaf Experience: Classics in Language and Education* (1984). Both works are devoted to the history of the deaf in the Western world, and have been significant to the movement for the equality of opportunity for deaf people in the United States.

Quote: "Language [can] be expressed . . . by movements of the hands and face just as well as by the small, sound-generating movements of the throat and mouth. Then the first criterion for language that I had learned as a student—it is spoken and heard—was wrong; and, more important, language did not depend on our ability to speak and hear but must be a more abstract capacity of the brain. It was the brain that had language, and if that capacity was blocked in one channel, it would emerge through another."

3D printing technology customises earphones, hearing aids

by [Teresa Umali](#)



Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne is leading a new research initiative that is using an ultra-fast 3D printing method to fit users with personalised ear devices in under an hour.

The custom, 3D printed devices are made using an iPhone's 3D scanning function and a proprietary system that takes a raw 3D scan and automatically processes it using advanced 3D statistical modelling.

Making a difference to the hearing impaired community

Traditionally, similar custom products have relied on uncomfortable, physical moulds, which take days to be made.

This project is different because of the ability to acquire the data in a convenient manner using the latest iPhone technology, and the automation system behind it allowing a turnaround time of under an hour, with most people opting for next day delivery.

People often experience the burden of earphones falling out or being uncomfortable. For those who wear hearing aids all day every day, a poorly fitted device is not just uncomfortable, it becomes painful.

Addressing Australia's hearing loss problem

Hearing loss is becoming an increasingly prevalent problem in society and is cited as the 'next smoking'.

With this in mind, ear solutions that everyday people like and can access are needed more than ever and where this technology fits.

Sound leakage, which causes users to listen to music at higher volumes and damages hearing, can be prevented by using personalised earphones.

Putting in the hard work

The technology needed to deliver such a fast turnaround from 3D scanning to 3D printing is based on the work of Dr Phil Kinsella, who completed his PhD at the University. His concept was to create and make something that is personally fit for the user, which is accessible and cost effective as well. He credits the University for allowing him to pursue his unique PhD.

Additionally, seed funding was acquired through Swinburne Ventures towards the end of the research and when the results were showing promise.

This has allowed the research to gain a new life as a commercial entity. The start-up is currently seeking to commercialise their product.

<https://www.opengovasia.com/3d-printing-technology-customises-earphones-and-hearing-aids/>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare releases reports on various health and welfare statistics

Coming reports:

- 21 August: Hearing health outreach services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Northern Territory July 2012 to December 2018
- 3 September: People with disability in Australia
- 25 September: Health expenditure in Australia 2017-18

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/news-media/forthcoming-releases>

Know someone who might like to get their own One in Six?

Drop us a line to hello@deafnessforum.org.au

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