



MEDIA RELEASE

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Tjapukai promotes Traditional Owner to senior role

Djabugay descendant Shirley Hollingsworth of the Buluwai Clan has been appointed Tjapukai Deputy General Manager after two decades of working at the Aboriginal cultural park in Cairns.

Tjapukai General Manager Bryce Madgwick congratulated Ms Hollingsworth who joined the tourism operator as a casual junior retail assistant in 1997 with the goal of acquiring the business knowledge necessary for a successful career as an artist.

"I couldn't do what I do without Shirley. I never make a decision without referring to her first because the cultural and operational knowledge she holds is phenomenal," Mr Madgwick said.

"I hope to one day step aside for Shirley as the long-term goal is to hand the operation of Tjapukai over to the Traditional Owners.

"Appointed Performance and Retail Manager in June 2016, Shirley's previous roles included Visitor Experience Manager, Guest Services Manager and Gallery Manager.

"She undertook her Certificate 1, 2 and 3 in Retail, a Certificate 4 in Frontline Management and a Diploma of Management through Tjapukai.

"In recent years, Shirley has undertaken conflict and resolution training and one-on-one management training which involved mentoring with an external coach brought on-site.

"Djabugay people have been the backbone of the Tjapukai business since it was launched in 1987 as a vehicle to share their culture and create employment for their people.

"Currently 72 per cent of our 63 staff are Indigenous and 11 of them work in management roles."

Ms Hollingsworth said she was motivated by the Djabugay elders who helped create Tjapukai especially her late mother Ruth Hollingsworth who was born and grew up on Mona Mona Mission on the outskirts of Kuranda in the rainforest of Tropical North Queensland.

"My other inspiration has been my mother's father Cecil Brim and her brothers and sisters as well as the extended families within the broader Djabugay community," she said.

"It was their resilience, vision, wisdom, knowledge and guidance that encouraged me by saying it's okay to be Aboriginal and to be proud of who we are as a people.

"Djabugay people have been the backbone of this business and it has helped preserve their connection to country, identity, language and culture in an evolving world.

"Working at Tjapukai gives you the opportunity to be proud of who you are as a people.

"I feel I have a responsibility to ensure we maintain this so Tjapukai is still around for future generations and continuing what our elders started.

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“I don’t do it alone, we’ve got a team of people all with their own strengths and I have family support both at and away from work.

“It is very important to understand and maintain the balance between business and culture to keep our mob engaged so I always include other Djabugay descendants in the workplace if any cultural issues arise.

“We also take the advice of Buda:Dji, the commercial arm of the Djabugay Tribal Aboriginal Corporation, to ensure we are meeting the requirements of their cultural content agreement with Tjapukai.

“Tjapukai has been a leader in many areas including Indigenous tourism, reconciliation and action, as well as in providing a lot of opportunities for both up and coming workers and for youth to gain skills for employment.

“My father Pastor Bill Hollingsworth said that working here gave me and the other Indigenous staff a prime opportunity to educate people and change their perceptions about who we are as people.

“I am humbled to take on this senior role and look forward to the challenge of playing a part in re-establishing Tjapukai as the premier Indigenous cultural experience in Australia proudly sharing the rainforest culture of the Djabugay people with visitors from around the world.”

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