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Thank you Deputy Chancellor, Dr Wendy Craik and a warm welcome to all – to staff of the University, friends and family of graduates and most importantly to all of those who are being honoured today – it's your day.

It is customary to commence public speeches with an acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the land. As all in the audience today would be aware, this is the Kuarna people.

There has been much debate in recent times of the importance and perhaps the genuineness of such acknowledgements. It is, even in the relatively short history of the colonisation of this country, a recent phenomenon to make such public acknowledgements. In the context of more than 40,000 years it is hardly a blip on the historical radar.

Other nations, including one of our closest neighbours New Zealand, have ingrained not only in their Constitution and via a Treaty but in their DNA recognition of the rights of the traditional inhabitants. In Australia we seem to have come to this point both slowly and it still feels, reluctantly.

In a way I agree with those who have questioned the value of public acknowledgements of the first Australians in events such as this. But not for the reasons some opponents to the practice have – rather on the basis that glib and perfunctory opening statements recognising traditional owners are probably little better than being silent on the matter.

Last month I attended a breakfast commemorating the 5th anniversary of the apology to the stolen generation. Kevin Rudd, who delivered that powerful apology in Parliament House when he was last Prime Minister, travelled to Adelaide to deliver the keynote address at that breakfast. Whatever those in the audience may think about Kevin, his capacity to connect with those who have suffered dispossession and forced separation is both impressive and profound. There were few dry eyes that morning as Mr Rudd and other speakers, including the University of South Australia's own Peter Buckskin, Dean Indigenous Scholarship Engagements & Research and Co—Chair of Reconciliation SA – addressed those who had turned up for an early morning breakfast at the nearby Convention Centre.

Why do I labour the point about the importance of recognising the first Australians in our words and our deeds? Well, first and foremost I believe it is our civic responsibility as Australians to find a true and meaningful reconciliation amongst Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Australians. As an Aboriginal friend and activist is fond of reminding me – it takes 2 to tango and the reconciliation process can't be left for Aboriginal people to shoulder responsibility for alone.

But there is another reason I might be seen to be labouring the point. And that is that as many of you take positions of leadership in your chosen fields and careers – as inevitably you will – you will need to make choices about your roles both personally and professionally in the reconciliation movement.

When I joined Uniting Communities a little over 2 years ago as the Chief Executive I wanted to make sure reconciliation and the enhancement of opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples became a central plank of the organisation's work and focus. The organisation had a long and rich history in reaching out to Aboriginal communities – particularly through initiatives like 'Paper Tracker' which has acted to keep governments honest and accountable for their promises to

improve the living conditions of Anangu living in remote communities across the north west of our state. Such activism, in the form of media briefings, relentless follow up of politicians, advisers and senior bureaucrats, a website which publishes the progress – or lack thereof – in closing the gap for Anangu on the lands and a weekly radio broadcast in English and Anangu, can come at some cost. Not surprisingly it's not an activity which attracts public funding. But as our advocacy gets too close for comfort I am from time to time asked to temper our criticism of government inactivity. As always I listen intently and politely – but as those of you who have taken a stance based on principle but underpinned by sound evidence will know – maintaining a firm line in the face of adversity is fundamentally important. When all is said and done it pales into insignificance against more than 200 years of injustice experienced by the first Australians.

As you progress your careers in the years to come you will make your own choices about how you will pursue your passions. Some of you will decide to do this quietly, working behind the scenes perhaps supporting others or becoming engaged in movements and actions for change. Others, as is perhaps consistent with your personality, will be more visible in leading change.

However, and perhaps this is the main message I would like to leave with you today, is that having undertaken the courses of study you are being honoured for today, you now take with you an obligation to be change agents in society. Beyond the technical and practical skills and knowledge you have attained I trust there is burning desire and commitment to bring about changes in the way our society operates. We live and are shaped by the communities in which we live and work. These can be positive, nurturing and rewarding places – but we know that for many around us they are none of these things.

- For many of our first Australians finding paid work, a safe and secure home or even being able to grow up with their family is a distant hope.
- For many of our newest Australians trying to find respite, safety and acceptance in this country after fleeing persecution, such a life remains a distant hope.
- And for those who prepare to give evidence to a Royal Commission on their experiences of abuse whilst in institutional care, the prospect of healing and recovery are also distant hopes.

Of course there are a host of other challenges and injustices to address.

I have worked recently with a young activist, undertaking a similar line of study to that which many of you have now completed. He has been involved in the northern suburbs of Adelaide engaging with the local community around the issue of compulsory income management – a Federal Government initiative designed on the one hand to protect those who are vulnerable by restricting how they can spend their government funded allowances whilst on the other hand stripping them of one of the most critical human rights – that of self determination. It's a vexed and difficult public policy issue – and it has served to split community service organisations in this State and indeed around Australia in terms of whether it should be embraced or opposed.

My point is not to argue the rights or wrongs of this particular piece of public policy. No doubt many of you will have formed your own views based not only on the philosophical merits or otherwise of this initiative but also on what the evidence tells us about its efficacy.

I use it merely as an illustration of the role many of you may have already played and I hope most of you will play in your future careers. That is your obligation to be activists and advocates aimed at raising public awareness and debate and ultimately creating a just and fairer society in which (as the Uniting Communities vision states) “everyone can participate and flourish”.

There is no shortage of public policy issues and causes in which to become engaged. As a society we are not always ready to embrace them but we are hungry for the debate – and each of you has a role to inform such public discourses in the future. They may be about

- The rights of those with a disability to lead a fulfilling life, or
- How to ensure our health systems deal with the causes of illness not just the cures.

I would be surprised if each and everyone graduating today doesn't have an issue which you don't feel passionate enough about to take action on.

There is a certain irony that we often feel most committed to change and activism in our student days when our resources are often at their lowest point – but as our capacity to take action increases through our careers our preparedness to lead such activism often fades.

I would implore you to not let that happen in your lives. I would love to read in years to come that the 2013 graduating class from the University of South Australia are at the forefront of social change. That you are the leaders and 'movers and shakers' of initiatives which truly re-shape our country.

I would like to conclude by referencing 2 quotes – quite different in origin but perhaps equally pertinent in their own way.

The first is somewhat more whimsical and I suspect not much referenced in academic literature. It's by Woody Allen who claimed "*that 90% of success is just turning up*".

I imagine that it is not based on any empirical study or evidence – so would be immediately dismissed for lacking rigour.

But let's assume it has some merit and try to understand what lies behind the claim. I read it as imploring us - to use a bit of the Australian vernacular - 'to have a go'. Being prepared to take a risk and getting involved. On this basis, as you have all made an appearance today, you are 90% on the way to making a success of your careers and lives.

I'm not suggesting that turning up is on its own a sufficient ingredient for success – or for that matter not turning up will preclude you from being successful. I didn't get to my own graduation some 30 years ago as a result of having already moved on from Adelaide in pursuit of my own career. But when it sometimes seems easier to avoid doing something it invariably means that making the effort is probably worthwhile. Turning up certainly gives you a far better chance of making things happen!

And finally for a quote with a bit more substance and perhaps more in keeping with the occasion of the celebrations today.

It comes from an old Greek man who is oft quoted. I think it needs no explanation or interpretation so I will simply leave you with these wise words from Aristotle:

"The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet."