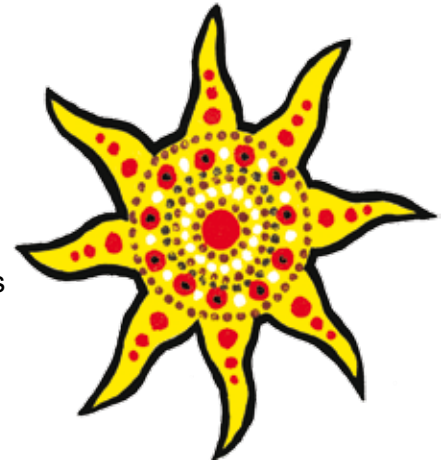


# The 13th Day



Yesterday was Day 13 of the New Year, 2012.

And on this day, I attended the funeral of the eighth South Australian Aboriginal person to die – the eighth death in our small community this year. And it was only Day 13.

These eight deaths are not of Aboriginal people who have lived to a ripe old age. The funerals were not celebrations of long and productive lives. No, they were all premature deaths, some of them violent, all premature and preventable.

Aboriginal people are always at funerals. We attend out of respect for our people and community. We give our condolences and cry for our loved ones.

On Friday the thirteenth it was the funeral of a young Aboriginal man, in his prime, who should have had so much to live for. Born 1990, died 2012. Death by suicide. I've been to too many funerals of similar circumstances.

I watched a grandfather speak, an uncle sing a song to his dead nephew, and a procession of young cousins and friends, there to say their last goodbyes, too soon, too early for all of this.

The day before this I attended the funeral of an Aboriginal lady aged 52, ravaged by diabetes for many years. How sad that you're considered an elder in the Aboriginal community if you live to age 50!

And there were the six other Aboriginal funerals. Of the eight premature deaths, three were by suicide and another was violent. How can this be considered right for Aboriginal people, in the 21st century, in a first world country like Australia?

And yet there is no mention of this continuing problem in the media apart from the obituaries, and the Aboriginal community itself reacts to this situation passively as if it's acceptable and just the normal course of things. It's not an issue for discussion or action, at any level of government or in any human rights forum. I tell you it's not the normal course of things.

Three young Aboriginal people have already committed suicide in this state in the first week and a half of 2012, and it's not raised a ripple that they felt so hopeless that it was easier to end their lives than live in this 'lucky country'. But lucky for who?

While death is the natural conclusion to life, it's not natural for Aboriginal people to be dying of preventable causes at this rate, years and years before the rest of the population. And yet this is what's taking place, as eight funerals in 13 days show.

The government says it's committed to Closing the Gap. This isn't occurring. In some areas things are getting worse.

I'm compelled to stand up and say something about what's happening. Nothing is changing. It's not just an issue for me to raise; we need to stand up as a community and say that this is unacceptable and something has to be done. And we too need to do something about it ourselves as Aboriginal people. We can't just keep ignoring it, from generation to generation.

This issue is not going to go away. It needs to be fixed, and this can only be done through proper advice and communication to government.

Our destiny is not entirely in the hands of those in power. It's also in our hands and it's time to take control of it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Amstrong".

[www.change.org/petitions/sa-minister-for-aboriginal-affairs-fund-a-24-hour-aboriginal-crisis-centre-in-adelaide#share](http://www.change.org/petitions/sa-minister-for-aboriginal-affairs-fund-a-24-hour-aboriginal-crisis-centre-in-adelaide#share)