School heads meet at forum

By MEZ FISHER

ABORIGINAL school principals, executives and head teachers from around NSW gathered together for the first time recently to discuss pathways to school leadership and possible barriers to Indigenous people getting the top job.

The newly formed NSW Deadly Leaders Alliance held its first forum last month at the Tweed Heads Bowling Club on the state’s far north coast, with 22 Aboriginal principals and executive teachers attending.

Organisers Dyonna Anderson, the principal of Cabbage Tree Island Public School on the NSW far north coast, said many Aboriginal principals felt isolated and disconnected, so making connections was important.

“IT is important to know that there is someone else who understands the issues faced by our leaders,” she said.

“There is a huge wealth of knowledge and expertise that can be tapped into in a co-ordinated way.”

Ms Anderson said one of the reasons the alliance members met was to examine why there were only 19 Aboriginal principals in the more than 2200 schools throughout the state.

“There’s a big gap between our executives, assistant principals and deputy principals and other leadership roles, with around 100 (Indigenous) people in those positions, but only 19 actual principals,” Ms Anderson said.

“We wanted to know why – it could be personal choice, or that they’re not being given the opportunity or support they need.”

Renowned educationalist Dr Chris Sarra, founder of the Stronger Smarter Institute and former principal of Chorborg State School in south-east Queensland, was a guest speaker and facilitator at the forum, titled Rising to the Challenge.

Ms Anderson said his sessions were confronting and reaffirming for many and the forum was “a very powerful couple of days”.

“We follow the ‘strongest smarter’ philosophy – the highest expectations for your school, your community and yourself,” she said.

“Some of the conversations were confronting for people, but it shifted them. At least three said afterwards that they’re stepping up. It was about giving people something to consider that they needed to do.”

Ms Anderson said the Deadly Leaders Alliance had developed a module for aspiring Aboriginal principals, with tips about writing applications, choosing referees and the interview process.

“It is important for our principals to feel valued and to be actively involved in the solutions that impact on Aboriginal leaders and our children,” Ms Anderson said.

“Times have changed and we (as Aboriginal people) have the ability to represent ourselves and our views in a well-informed and culturally focused way.”

The group will make a presentation at a NSW Department of Education conference in Sydney on April 30.

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