



FRONTIER CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Profile Series

Profile of:

LUKE BRISCOE

***" as a child I was surrounded by innovation which was
built from necessity and it stuck with me "***

Luke Briscoe, 39, is an Indigenous Australian business leader on a mission to expand Indigenous involvement in the national economy, especially through STEM (STEM is an acronym for the fields of science, technology, engineering and math).

Over the last few decades, there has been a surge in Indigenous ownership of small businesses in Australia, which is changing the face of Australian business.

Briscoe is the founder and CEO of INDIGI LAB, a Sydney-based Indigenous owned and operated business that aims to create innovative projects for social and environmental change through digital culture. Briscoe says the larger objective is to, "create a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are leading in science, technology and digital innovation."



He noticed the gaps in employment and opportunities in STEM fields for Indigenous Australian people. The business organization works on providing opportunities for Indigenous students to be exposed to STEM education. In 2017, the organization helped bring 120 Indigenous students to the annual Indigenous Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) camp.

"Indigenous Australian contributions to the Australian economy is in the billions, but no one talks about our annual growth," said Briscoe, in an interview. Briscoe is a

Kuku Yalanji man from Far Northern Australia and is recognized culturally as a "a custodian of the reef and rainforest in the local area."

A 2016 report by PwC's Indigenous Consulting (PIC) and PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting (Australia) revealed that Indigenous businesses (all self-employed individuals, enterprises and trusts combined) contributed about \$2.2 billion to \$6.6 billion to the Australian economy, which amounted to about 0.1 percent to 0.4 percent of the total GDP of Australia.

At present, Indigenous leaders and politicians are recognizing the massive problem of "passive welfare dependency" among Indigenous Australians and the negative effects this has on their communities. He was quick to add that this growth potential is in a specific area.

"I think in the global push for (environmental) sustainability, Indigenous Australian business (if cultural rights are protected and maintained) can be a leading force in green business."

Briscoe said that the Indigenous Australian business sector can be leading in best practices and clean energy supply chains. Concepts of environmental stewardship, of course, are not foreign to Indigenous communities in Australia, as they are in line with their traditional values. Briscoe said that his people have sustained the pristine areas of his childhood for thousands of years.

As a child, Briscoe said he grew up surrounded by nature. He lived on the coast in a small town called Innisfail, which is located in the Australian state of Queensland. "My childhood memories were of swimming and fishing. I find that I'm connected with both the salt and freshwater areas," he said.

Briscoe attributed to his later involvement in innovation to his small-town roots.

He said that growing up in his town, “You would see people working two or sometimes even three jobs. I think what I learnt from living in a small community was how much small towns thrive on supporting each other. You would see cane farmers selling fruit to the local grocer and likewise with fisherman. So, as a child I was surrounded by innovation which was built from necessity and it stuck with me as an adult,” he said, proudly.

Briscoe said that when he got older and his father passed away in his teens, he did not have any thoughts of university as he was expected to find a job. He said he was looking for a first job in tourism, which was a booming industry where he lived. He decided to become a chef. After that did not last, he took up a job in music sales and developed a passion for art, music and film. He wanted to combine the three interests, so he studied screen and media and then relocated to Brisbane and later moved to Sydney. He said he is now studying for a master’s degree in digital communications and culture.

He worked as a youth worker where he developed a national Indigenous media employment program. The program turned out to be very successful. It created more First Nations jobs in the screen and media sector.

Briscoe also held positions at the Australia Council for the Arts and National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, the main representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. He also worked for the National Indigenous Television (NITV), an Australian television channel that broadcasts programming produced largely by Indigenous Australians.

Although INDIGI LAB is still at the start-up stage, he said, they have been able to assemble a team of highly-skilled experts across many fields of science, technology, and public policy. They have been able to develop business opportunities and have enabled their brand to be very strong in

the STEM sector.

Although he said Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs still face bias about their role in science jobs, he said that government initiatives like the Indigenous procurement policy program are helping Indigenous firms succeed in the business world. These procurement policies are incentivizing business firms to employ Indigenous firms in their supply chains.



However, Briscoe still feels that Indigenous Australian businesses need more help in creating start-up firms. Individual entrepreneurial initiatives without procurement support are the goal.

The main obstacle facing Indigenous businesses, he said, is in financing these independent start ups without government help. Briscoe said one way to encourage Indigenous entrepreneurship in all fields is to host more business conferences and summits where lucrative business relationships can be made.



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The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is an independent, non-profit organization that undertakes research and education in support of economic growth and social outcomes that will enhance the quality of life in our communities. Through a variety of publications and public forums, Frontier explores policy innovations required to make the prairie region a winner in the open economy. It also provides new insights into solving important issues facing our cities, towns and provinces. These include improving the performance of public expenditures in important areas such as local government, education, health and social policy. The author(s) of this study have worked independently and the opinions expressed are therefore their own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the board of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from northeastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations. For over two years, he covered House standing committees as well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.