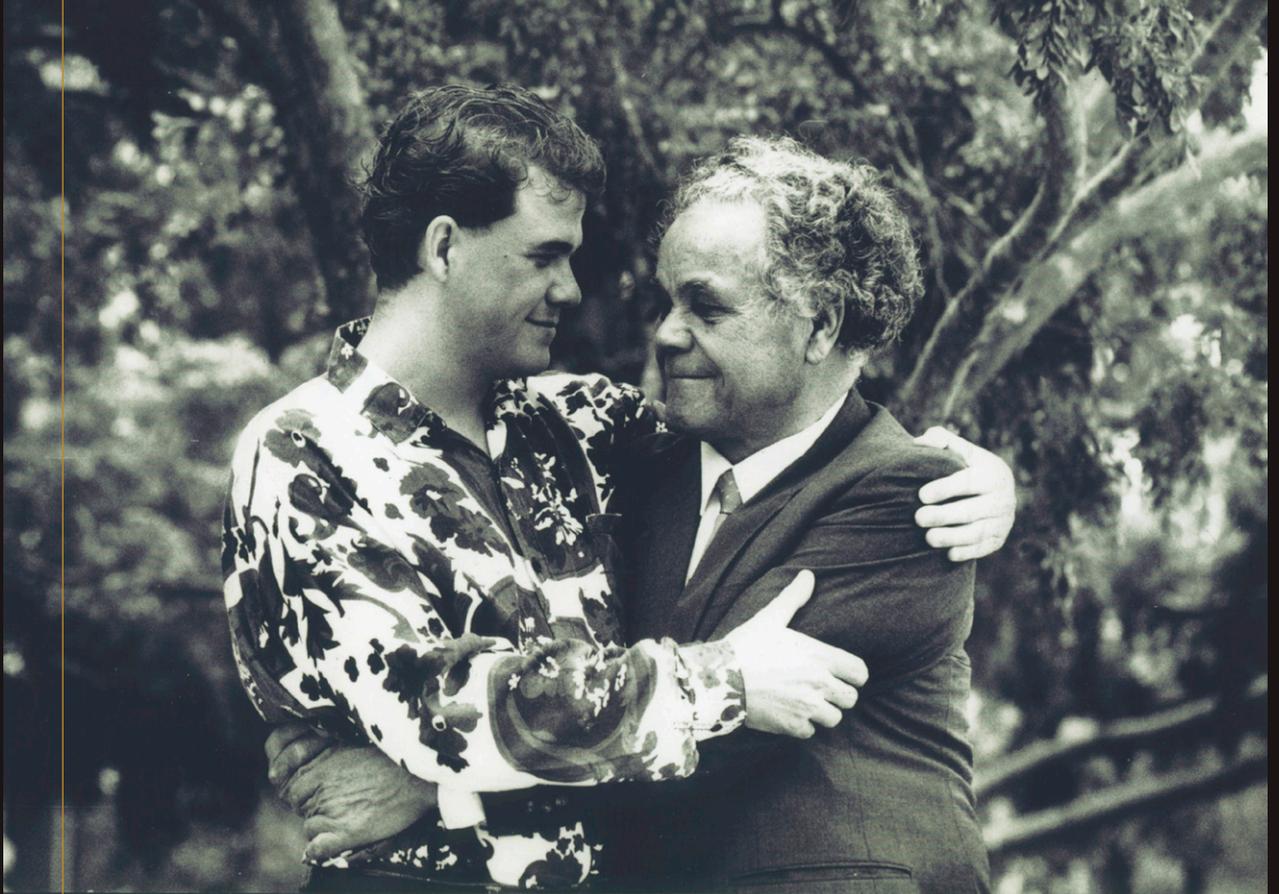




Australian  
National  
University



# THE JOSEPH AND LINDSAY CROFT MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Image: Lindsay Croft (1967–1994) and Joseph Croft  
(c. 1925/6–1996), at Lindsay's award 1992 Young  
Canberran of the Year, Australian National University.  
Photograph (c) The Canberra Times, 1992

The Joseph and Lindsay Croft Memorial Scholarship at The Australian National University has been initiated by the family and friends of the Croft family to assist Australian First Nations students to achieve their goals and commit to working for the betterment of others within First Nations communities throughout Australia.

The Scholarship honours two distinguished leaders of First Nations communities from different generations, Joseph Croft and his son Lindsay, both members of the Gurindji/Malngin/Mudburra nations from the Northern Territory.

## Joseph Croft

Joe Croft (c. 1925/6–1996) was born on Victoria River Downs in the Northern Territory. At the time VRD was one of the largest cattle stations in the world. The station, and region, though named after a far distant British monarch, was on the traditional homelands of the Karangpurru nation, with neighbouring homelands of the Bilinara, Gurindji, Malngin, Mudburra, Ngarinman, Ngaliwurru and Wardaman nations.

One of the thousands known as the Stolen Generations, Joe was taken, with his mother, as a toddler to Kahlin Compound in Darwin in 1927, before he was sent south to government and church-operated institutions in Pine Creek (1931–33) and Alice Springs (1933–1940). These institutions officially aimed to assimilate mixed-heritage children into Australian society.

Joe was exceptionally gifted as a child. He won one of only two scholarships offered by the Federal Government open to all children in the Northern Territory. Supported in his education by Anglican minister, Father Percy Smith at the Bungalow Half-Caste Home in Alice Springs, Joe attended All Souls Anglican School in Charters Towers (1940–43) where he was elected captain of the School and Sports Captain of Ramsay House.

From school, he attended Brisbane University (University of Queensland) (1944–1948) — the first First Nations person to attend university in Australia — but, with the war, he left before graduating to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force (army). After nineteen months the war ended and he returned to his studies in 1947, before leaving to pursue work and travel in other states of the country in 1948.

For the next decade Joe worked various jobs before becoming a contracting surveyor on the building of dams in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. In 1959 he met his future wife Dorothy working on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. Following their wedding in 1962 they moved across the country where Joe worked as a surveyor on the changeover to standard gauge on the WA Railways. Their eldest children Brenda and Lindsay were born in Perth, before the family returned to the eastern states in the late 1960s, where Joe worked as a surveyor on Toonumbar Dam, with their youngest son, Timothy born in 1971.

From 1972 to early 1974 they ran a newsagency in Woodburn, northern New South Wales. In May 1974, having sold their business the family travelled to Darwin where Joe was reunited with his mother, Bessie, having last seen her for one night in 1940 on his way to boarding school in Charters Towers. Sadly, she passed away seven months later.

In 1975 the family moved to Canberra where Joe had joined the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, later working with the Aboriginal Development Commission until he left the public service in 1985. In the late 1970s Joe was seconded to work with All Grassby for the Anti-Discrimination Board, travelling throughout Australia to assess cases. During his tenure he was closely involved with First Nations communities and individuals from across Australia.

Joe was a driving force behind the establishment of sporting and arts organisations, helping organise the first NAIDOC Week displays and events in Canberra. It showcased artists work from around Australia, working with primary and

secondary schools and universities, as well as undertook national and international tours with artists such as David Gulpilil and Bobby Bunungurr, associated with Ramingining community in central Arnhem Land. In the mid-1980s he retired and moved to Sydney, becoming a partner in a small arts/cultural business, before establishing his own First Nations arts/cultural stall at the Rocks Market. Throughout his life Joe worked closely with First Nations and non-Indigenous people at national and international levels.

He was extremely proud of his children's achievements and was devastated when Lindsay was killed in a car accident in the USA on 3rd August, 1994. A few months after his son's death, Joe was severely injured in a traffic accident. Seemingly on the mend after a lengthy recuperation, in May 1996 he was diagnosed with leukaemia and passed away on 22 July, less than two years after Lindsay's death.

Joe Croft was a quiet hero whose life's work was to encourage and promote greater understanding and sharing of First Nations art and culture, especially educating others to understand and respect its rich diversity and breadth. His life spanned the gamut of government policies to dispossess and assimilate and First Nations self-determination.

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## Lindsay Joseph Croft

Lindsay was considered a future First Nations leader through his tireless involvement with First Nations and non-Indigenous communities, particularly in the ACT but also throughout Australia and overseas. He graduated from Canberra University with a Bachelor of Applied Science, majoring in Indigenous healthcare. Lindsay was also awarded a Graduate Diploma in Public Policy from the Australian National University.

Lindsay was elected President of the Student's Association at the University of Canberra 1990–91, and he was National Convener of the Aboriginal Working Party of the National Union of Students 1991–92. The community recognised his extraordinary talents when he was appointed the Canberra Junior Citizen of the Year, President of the ACT Indigenous Cultural Society (1993), and a member of the ACT Chief Minister's Youth Advisory Council (1993). In 1993 his promise was recognised with a prestigious Harkness Fellowship to Harvard University, where he studied the effects of Public Policy on Indigenous Peoples.

While at Harvard, he arranged an exchange program for young First Nations students from Australia, Robert Waters and Brydee Barnett, with the assistance of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, to attend a summer school with the Native American Preparatory School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he had a six-week teaching placement.

Following this, whilst travelling through southwest USA with his wife, Rebecca, Robert and Brydee, and a fellow student, Conlon Chino (Santa Clara Pueblo) Lindsay was tragically killed in a car accident on 3 August 1994, a few days short of his 27th birthday.

His death was mourned by his family, friends, communities he had worked with in Australia and overseas, and representatives from all political parties, including then Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating, who wrote in a letter to the family: "Lindsay's tragic death marks a great loss. It's a loss to those who knew and loved him. It's a loss to the Aboriginal community, which held such high hopes for him. And it's certainly a loss to the nation".

Both Joe and Lindsay were staunch advocates for First Nations education, based on their lived experience as groundbreaking First Nations students, half a century apart. The Joseph and Lindsay Croft Scholarship was established to honour their memory through supporting First Nations students.

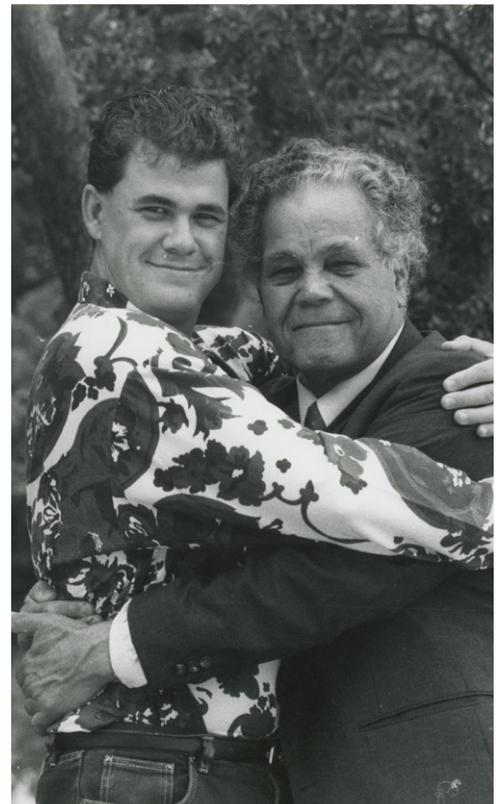


Image: Lindsay Croft (1967 – 1994) and Joseph Croft (c. 1925/6 – 1996), at Lindsay's award 1992 Young Canberran of the Year, Australian National University. Photograph (c) The Canberra Times, 1992



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