

PODCAST



Season 2 — Episode 2

First Nations Youth Issues

RACHEL HOCKING

Hello and welcome to a special podcast series from The Healing Foundation, Healing Our Way. This is the second season of the Healing Our Way podcast and in this series young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share their thoughts about intergenerational trauma, healing, and the concept of truth telling.

We yarn with The Healing Foundations Youth Reference Group members and their special guests to talk about their journeys, and their thoughts on how we can continue to heal our communities.

To begin, we would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Lands and Waters across this beautiful continent, and we Acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders and to Stolen Generation survivors, of the Dreaming, and of the here and now. We recognise the ongoing nature of trauma experiences for First Nations peoples, and we commit each day to survivor led intergenerational healing.

Before listening, please take note that this podcast may touch on sensitive topics related to trauma, so please take care while listening. And if you feel the need to speak out with anyone, you can contact, 13 YARN on 13 92 76 and talk with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander crisis support worker, your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health centre or your preferred support services.

I'm Rachel Hocking and I'm going to be your host for the second season of the Healing Our Way podcast. In this episode we yarn with Blake Tatafu and Karlie Stewart about the issues that are affecting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, but also the issues that matter the most to them. Thank you both for joining me. Look, I think it's always lovely to hear youse introduce yourselves in your own words, so gonna start with you Karlie, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah, I'm Karlie. I'm a Yuin woman from South Coast of New South Wales. Most of my family lives in and around Nowra, throughout Norwa and Wreck Bay, which is in Jervis Bay. Yeah, and I have mob pretty much from Lapa here in Sydney, all the way back down towards the Victorian border. So pretty well connected down there on the South Coast. I'm currently living in Wollongong, which is on Dharawal Land and I moved there about a year and a half ago, but before that I was living up here in Sydney on Bidjigal Land, so have some pretty strong connections in around La Perouse. That kind of Southeast Sydney community so...yeah. That's me, I'm twenty seven and the second eldest of nine kids. So, got a big family. Yeah. And I feel really happy to be here and to be talking about this topic because yeah, like I said, being the 2nd eldest of... so many young kids I feel really passionate about this topic and making sure that we're representing young people in the best way that we can. So thanks for having me.

RACHEL HOCKING

Hey, thanks for being here. Being from Wollongong and having all those South Coast connections. Pretty special time, seeing all the whales migrating.

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah, I've got this weird thing with whales where, like... I'll be driving past the ocean. Won't be looking at it. And then I'll look over and there'll be like a whale breaching out of the water, it's so weird. But yeah, it's been good. There's been heaps of like orcas, even hanging around down around Merimbula, so that's pretty special.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, well, they say the numbers are really thriving compared to a couple of decades ago.

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah, it's pretty incredible to see.

RACHEL HOCKING

What about you, Blake? I've heard a bit about you in the previous episode, but for our listeners who are, maybe meeting you for the first time, can you tell us a bit about yourself?

BLAKE TATAFU

Yeah. My name is Blake Tatafu. I'm a proud Wiradjuri Dunghutti man with my family coming from Trangie and Kempsey. And that's on my mum's side. And my father is a Tongan man, so I've grown up with a combination of two very strong and staunch cultures that both have a similarity with the connection to community and their family. Born and raised in Western Sydney on Darug Country, where I still currently live. And I have a really good time with my community out there. I'm the eldest of seven, so I think I'm the parents' guinea pig and also their oldest babysitter that they have. But that's fine by me because my sisters that are younger than me, still think they're the boss of me. But that's alright. I work out Western Sydney. All my life is based out there and I'm really passionate about the young people that I get to work with there. And the all the ways I get to see them grow and the way that they help me grow too.

RACHEL HOCKING

Really similar. I'm second oldest of 7, but I'm the oldest girl and you're probably right about your sisters because I definitely boss around my older brother. Whether he likes it or not. Karlie, I wanted to ask you how you first got involved with The Healing Foundation. We heard a bit about Blake's journey to the Youth Reference Group in the last episode but how did you end up here?

KARLIE STEWART

Well, I was on my social work placement back in 2017 at a community service organisation around South East Sydney, out there towards Lapa. And I had this email come across to apply for this forum. Their Youth Forum with The Healing Foundation. And yeah, thought I'd apply for it and say hi. I didn't think I would even get a look in to be honest with you, I don't know what I just thought, 'ohh this would be fun'.

So we went along and it ended up being in Queensland like, little bit west of Brisbane and heaps of other young Blackfullas there, so it was good. I think we were there for three days and we ended up putting together this report and kind of from that there was this idea that, you know, we needed a youth reference group and yeah.

So the people who were there kind of formed the first Interim Youth Reference Group. So I was a part of that and. That went on for a little bit. And then I think it kind of just fizzled out overtime and I ended up becoming employed with The Healing Foundation doing some stuff with the team down in Melbourne. So, worked on the Schools Resources Kit and yeah, I was there for a little bit and then ended up getting another job finishing my Uni degree. Went our separate ways, and then this email come across my desk a little while ago to apply for the Youth Reference Group that we're on now.

So, I thought I'd love to be involved again. I just love the work that The Healing Foundation does and what we stand for and, you know, trying to move away from the deficit kind of narratives and moving into whatever we need to do to make healing happen for our communities, and especially being a young person talking about that stuff I think is important. I feel passionately about it. I wanna be a part of it. So yeah, I'm back on the Youth Reference Group now with The Healing Foundation and yeah, I co-chair that with Harry so, yeah, it's pretty good. I'm enjoying it.

RACHEL HOCKING

Beautiful. Clearly it says a lot about The Healing Foundation that you were with the organisation and then, you know, you went somewhere else, but you came back. It's nice to see, you know, our community is really like nurturing the organisations that nurture us.

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah. And I think one of the things that I respect is staff, like they're just so committed to what we do and going above and beyond to support our communities, and nurture our communities, and making sure that we're... especially the way that we kind of give visibility and a voice to our Stolen Generations mob and making sure that they're looked after. And yeah, I've just always appreciated that about The Healing Foundation. It's not tokenistic or you know something that they do because they want the... 'the clout', so to speak. Yeah, it's just genuine. And yeah, I appreciate being a part of it. And that's something I really respect about the organisation.

RACHEL HOCKING

Especially when it comes to working with young mob here. Because yeah, there is a lot of that tokenism out in those services, and we'll talk a bit more about the services that our young mob do have available to them a little bit later in the yarn, but Blake. I'm just gonna pick your brain. What are you and your peers yarning about at the moment? What matters to your mob?

BLAKE TATAFU

I think what's really important for young people around my age at the moment is just the cost of living, and renting, and housing availability. I think all of us are being challenged right now, just looking at different things. Ways that we can save money, ways that we can make more money. It's really material, but that's kind of what's really prominent because a lot of the people in my circle, in particular my peers, we support our families financially and it gets harder to do that and it gets harder to support yourself like, when you're working hard and you're supporting your family but everything just seems to be going up.

That at face value is what we're talking a lot about. From that aspect, but if we're looking a little bit further and a little bit deeper, I think there's a lot of conversations at the moment about the referendum. And there's a lot of conversations about justice reinvestment for our kids and our community. So you can kind of take your pick there. Yeah, it's a bit of a mixed plate, but that's what's important to us right now.

RACHEL HOCKING

There's definitely threads that connect those experiences. But you're right like bringing up cost of living. First and foremost, you know that we live in a capitalist society and that is the reality of this world that we're in. And so, because of the cost of living crisis, so many of not just our young mob, but anybody who's living on low income is having to prioritise just how you get food on your plate, how you get a shelter over your head, instead of maybe being able to pour their energy back into, you know, the community stuff. Back into those other issues you're talking about, whether it's yarning about The Voice or talking about decarceration and justice reinvestment. I've noticed I don't know how youse think about this but that when you have these money pressures, it zaps your energy, and your ability to really engage in those other things that are meaningful to you. Do you find that, Karlie?

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah, I think that's definitely true. But something else I'd say about having those money pressures is the sense of isolation and shame that you feel around not having money. I think like Blackfullas generally have always been kind of stereotyped as 'poor people, don't have money, don't want to work, don't wanna this, don't wanna that'. And it, you know, there's already that kind of stigma that exists. I think there's deeper pressure then, how am I going to send my kids to school if we don't have food in the house to send them to school with? And then there's the other pressures around, but then they're not going to school or, you know, even kids just wanting to have a social life.

Like I said, I've got eight siblings and four of them are under the age of eighteen in their kind of teenage years. Well, five of them are. One of them's only five, but the other four, you know, they're fourteen, sixteen, seventeen and seventeen, so it's... you know, they wanna go to the movies with their friends. They wanna go for drives with their friends. They wanna do all this stuff. There's no money to do it. And so even when we're thinking about things like having social activities and things to keep entertained, so they're not just getting caught up in trouble as kids do, as young people do, they're not able to have access to those opportunities.

I think that's a big one as well that isolation and how that impacts people's like, spiritual, and mental health, and well being like... It's, yeah it's pretty tricky. I think there's the personal part of it where you're saying like you feel that burden personally because you're someone who provides for your family and all that. And I definitely feel that, but I think I'm lucky enough to have a job that I can do that, but you know, my mum doesn't have a job and my sisters don't have jobs and they're doing their HSC. Those things that relieve some of the pressures in life as it is, that makes them feel healthy and well and like they're thriving and able to contribute and you know, have that good spirit and that good self-esteem I think yeah, it's a struggle all around. So yeah, I definitely agree with that.

BLAKE TATAFU

Yeah, it kind of trickles down everywhere. I mean, you know where I'm working now we're getting lots of phone calls and emails from our parents that can't provide devices for the kids to do at home learning for schools. Even though we're in a Post-Covid living situation, it's still winter. It's still flu season. Schools are still diverting to be working from home and a lot of our young people in Western Sydney in particular are already excluded the moment they get sent home for school.

Because they don't have access to those devices and it's kind of like, ok, when you think about all of the outgoing money that you have in order to support a family, a lot of the families that I work with don't even have enough to stay at like a medium level of surviving. So with everything going up and up and I know money is such a almost crass thing to talk about, right? But it's something that's so real and it's hitting everybody like. I think I was having a conversation with one of the mums that came and she said look, it's honestly a lot easier to go to Maccas every night than to cook a home cooked meal for my kids because that's just how it's going.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's right, I mean, there there's been a lot of studies done on how, like McDonalds were places where poor communities came together and bonded and often poor black communities, you know. And still to this day, often the cheapest option for a lot of families. And so yeah, there might be a lot of judgement attached to that, but guess what? That's what people can afford. And there's also, I don't know, back when I was growing up, it was a bit of a sense of community when, especially when you went to the KFC up the road and Big Bucket.

BLAKE TATAFU

Yeah, meeting spot.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, meeting spot that's it.

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah, we laugh cause they got 3 Maccas in Nowra all on the main road, there's one when you come into town, one in the middle of town, and one when you leave town. When they were building them, I said, well, what do they need all these Maccas for? Where the kids gonna go after school? They need a Maccas to hang out. I thought surely they can go to a park or someone's house or Kmart even just go somewhere, why're you gonna sit around a Maccas for? But anyways, yeah, just a thought. It's so funny.

RACHEL HOCKING

It's often where we get our first jobs too.

KARLIE STEWARTY

Yeah, I worked at Maccas. I'm not hating. Yeah.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah good training ground. Yeah, that's it. You touched on another thing Blake that I think is really important. And that's like this, like... working from home and doing school from home and you know, not even just like having access to an iPad or a laptop, but just simple things like do you have a strong enough Wi-Fi connection? If you have those things? Overcrowded housing and even if it's not overcrowded but just having like multiple family members that you share a home with, having animals in the background, our families always have dogs running around. And then you know, just having the quiet space to, like, actually focus when you have multiple responsibilities as a family member, as a community member. And it must get really frustrating to hear all these politicians talking about personal responsibility, as if, as if we have the ability to care about our individual needs more than our collective community needs. Is it getting frustrating hearing how politicians are yarning about young mob? And the cost of living crisis at the moment?

BLAKE TATAFU

I'm sick of young people being exploited by politicians for either, you know, goodwill or support towards whatever they're trying to do for any election commitment or even just using them as a fluff piece to push their agenda. I think young people get used as a tool just to be like a filibuster, right? They're just thrown in there to be like, OK, we're thinking about the young people, this is how we're going to address youth crime, for example.

It's always sensationalised and it's just used in a way as a tactic to I guess... for them to push another narrative. So young Black kids in particular are constantly being trashed, to be seen as a problem that needs a remedy, a problem that they have a solution for. And it's so frustrating because the solutions are never by politicians. The solutions are from the kids themselves.

RACHEL HOCKING

You don't really see, you know, they're not getting young mob really. They're not handing over the microphone, they're speaking for all young people as if they know, and can tap into their minds. I got some, you know, sad and very well-known statistics to read out and the reason I do this is to just, because I think it's important to remind listeners who might not be across everything that we deal with as Blakfullas. But as we know, Australia locks up kids as young as ten years old. We know our Blak kids are overrepresented in those figures, and we know that in the Northern Territory there are multiple times where those figures are 100% of young people in juvenile detention, are Aboriginal. How do you and your peers, think about the way the Raise The Age campaign has gone in the last couple of years? Because it feels like it's had these peaks, where it's been talked about a lot and then it feels like it goes real quiet for a while. Karlie, how do you reflect on the campaign?

KARLIE STEWART

Well, just generally speaking, I think the campaign is so important and I've told personal stories at times about why we need to be doing what we can to prevent interaction with these kind of oppressive systems like policing and the judicial system, with our young Blak kids especially. But I think just young kids, generally, they don't need to be interacting with those systems. And so I think generally speaking is something I find really important. I'm very passionate about it. To answer your question about how I feel about it at the moment, I agree that it goes through these peaks and valleys and you know, a couple of years back, we felt like we'd had a lot of momentum and it really felt like, oh, this is, we're going to be able to do something with this, and then all the States and Territories just voted it down.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's right. At COAG [Council of Australian Governments], we had this big hope. I remember that moment.

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah. Yeah. And I think that's, the part of that that's disappointing for me is that, so much of that is because of public kind of rhetoric, around punishment and discipline. And, well, if a young person does something wrong, they need to be punished for it. But it is very much a national conversation where we need to be flipping that kind of rhetoric on its head and saying well kids don't deserve to be punished for being kids or for not having access to the opportunities that prevent them from doing crime, if that's what they want to call it.

And as well, we need to be looking at the reasons why young people are committing crime and the kind of crime that they are doing like. In my opinion, if a young kid's going to the shop and stealing food because they haven't eaten and they're hungry. Why are we punishing kids for that? Why are we not saying 'ok, well, there's obviously something going on here that this kid feels like they need to go on and go steal food', or, you know, kids jumping buses or trains or whatever to get to where they need to be. Why are we having police interactions with kids over doing that stuff? They deserve to be able to access public transport just as much as we, who can pay for it, do.

Yeah, so there's the public conversation. I think that contributes a lot to the reason why it doesn't have as much traction as it should. And to me personally, it just feels really silly. I don't know why we're even having a conversation about it. I don't even know why we're locking ten year old kids up, eleven year old. I don't know why we're looking anyone up, to be honest with you. But children you know, I was in case work, a couple of years back. And the age group that I predominantly worked with was twelve to seventeen year olds. So much of that work was in and out of courts, in and out of youth court driving to and from Raby out near Campbelltown. Picking kids up from where they were locked up, bringing them home. Doing it again the next week, breach bail, going to court. Like just this that cycle and you just think, like, this is preventing these kids from doing other things that actually make them feel good and give their lives some kind of purpose and meaning.

And I'm just wasting my time. I'm wasting their time. They're wasting their own time. Everyone's wasting their time trying to lock up kids. It just doesn't make any sense to me, and especially during Covid. You know, I had a client who was locked up for twenty three hours for the whole seven days that she was locked up for out at Ruby. They had her because it was during Covid. They had her isolated, so there was seven days where she was locked up, away from the rest of the unit, and she was only allowed outside for an hour a day. That's like solitary confinement. That's the type of stuff you do to torture legitimate criminals, you know, people who are doing some really serious stuff wrong in our society and she just had a breach bail because she was on the wrong train. And it's like, you know, where do we draw the line?

If we're having a conversation about, you know, these kids need to be punished. Is that a punishable offence for someone to not see sunlight for twenty three hours a day and separated from their peers and yeah, I just think it's such a big conversation and such an important conversation, I think we could be doing better as a nation to kind of engage in that. You know that discussion and trying to flip people's minds about it.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, and you know, you're absolutely right, that language of punishment, even the language of rehabilitation. These ideas that, especially when you're talking about children, as if they have problems that are theirs to solve, as if their life circumstances are their responsibility. Yeah, nah, I just think it's heartbreaking. You know, we have it in our family too, and it's it gets exhausting because you can see the cycle repeating itself before it even happens.

And you know what's going to happen. And you know it's a waste of time. And you know it's a waste of state money. Plus, your family's money, and your resources, but there is nothing stopping it. The wait list for the restorative services and the culturally appropriate rehabilitation centres, they are just so long for our young mob, you know. Blake for you and the communities you're a part of. What do the services look like, that actually do provide healing for our mob? Like, what are the services that you will lean on?

BLAKE TATAFU

And some of the spaces that I've been involved with, including from where I've worked, all that they have in common is that they're inclusive, that they let the young people lead their journey or lead their program or their group, whatever that may be. It's centring, putting them at the centre of everything, so it's giving them agency. It's giving them self-determination, and it's giving them leadership because our young people are already inherent leaders of their own journey. They're the experts, so when we're working with young people, we know as Aboriginal people that we can't come in at, even at our ages. I can't dictate or give a pure, proper advice to a fifteen, to a twelve year old about what works for them or how I can help them in a particular area of need. They're the ones who have to tell me because they're the experts.

Organisations who've been very much youth led and person centred have always, like, had great outcomes. I also like want to say, on the flip side, that there's been a lot of NGOs who have used young Aboriginal people to start groups or to start something that gets them excited. It gets them participating, and then it goes nowhere. And it kind of puts them in a place of distrust with any type of services that try to do the right thing.

RACHEL HOCKING

Like Blak cladding.

BLAKE TATAFU

Yes. Yeah. So like I'll think of... without even naming names, I'll just say an NGO gets a certain amount of money to work with young Aboriginal kids. They set up a campaign and set up a program and that may have a shelf life of 12 months. You get these Blak kids together for 12 months, you give them hope that they've got importance. You give them a bit of meaning, you give them their self-determination, their agency, they're excited to come together. And do things and be a part of something, have a part of belonging outside of where they already fit in. They do the project, they do the program and then it runs out, or then it ends because the fundings ended. There's a massive distrust that comes from after that, and I mean, I used to really push a lot of my younger cousins into those spaces where they can, you know, do something for the community or do something in sports, do something in arts, and all of them had limited funding, or limited availability from services. Or, if not, an extremely long wait time to be a part of something and they're not interested now. Like, you know, there's a there's a certain window of time that you can get our young people engaged and involved. And if you let them down the first time, you've lost them.

RACHEL HOCKING

God that's such a good point Blake, cause you know, yeah, what can happen during that waitlist time is like, crucial, right? You know, you can lose so much of that engagement, that willingness, because once again, the system is sidelining their needs, and often they're like critical needs. And then it's interesting and talking about, you know, these anonymous NGOs, because what can also happen is, you know, there's competition for money that really should be directed towards Blak services run by Blak people.

BLAKE TATAFU

Absolutely. What frustrates me is that if there are no services that can provide adequate opportunities to our young people, chances are they're going to go in another direction that may not be healthy for them, or positive. Because when you think about it, you've already got society and law that looks at our kids from ten years old thinking that they have the right mind to determine what's right or wrong. So they're already going to be tried as an adult in crime anyway. If they engage in it, or if they engage in risky behaviours. And I'm not saying that these program for young people should be there to prevent youth crime or you know, what that looks like, "crime", inverted commas, or like, youth being disengaged from regular services. It's just that you're going to lose them to something else if you don't focus on what they're good at already.

Like, I've said it before and I always say, young people are already excellent. Young people carry with them the strength, and the power that they, they may not know it yet, some might know, but they've got that with them. And I guess for me as an older man now, I look at and think ok, cool, there's so much potential that I can show you that you have. And you can do whatever you want with it because it's beautiful and it's amazing and it's Blak, but you lose them, and you've lost them for a long time. The work to get them back, the work to get them to self believe, the work to get them to really see themselves for who they are. Which is great and proud and Blak. That's.... the work is so much harder and sometimes you don't get them back.

RACHEL HOCKING

Thank you for sharing that Blake cause it goes to show like how much of a mentor you have, you know, also become as well as a young person. You know, you really like... It's when you can just see the innate joy you get from talking about our young mob and you feel it. That's when they're gonna feel it. You know, when they see us feeling that proud. I wanted to talk to you Karlie about what differentiates like a proper Black therapeutic service from something that's tokenistic, you know, what makes it strong?

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah, it's funny. I was talking to my older sister. She's got a son and he's in kindergarten, and I was talking to her the other night about just getting him someone to talk to. And as I was having this conversation, and I was thinking, is he going to want to talk? Like maybe he should just should do like, art therapy or play therapy and then, anyways, I suggested all these solutions to my sister and then at the end of the phone call I just said maybe we just need to get him out on Country? Like in my head, I was falling asleep, and I was like, maybe we can just take him, I don't know, get some oysters or just things. I was thinking back on what we used to do that made us feel really strong and healthy as young fullas. And, it was always being at the beach or, you know, we used to take a pot of water down the beach, start a little fire and cook periwinkles on the rocks.

We'd be at the beach all day and that would just be me and fifteen, twenty of my cousins, you know, and that's the stuff that makes us feel strong and connected and grows our identity as Blackfullas. We learn who we are as Blak people, not who other people tell us who we should be as Blak people. And I think that's what's important for our young fullas, is having a space where they feel that they can express themselves in a way that they want to. Not how we tell them that they should or... you know, even if they've got... if we say, oh, they need cultural opportunities. What does that actually look like for them? It's not about white fullas saying, oh, well, here's what culture looks like that's colonising our cultures again.

You know, we need to move away from that kind of... these Western kind of ways of doing things and start thinking about how we do things as Blak people. And that looks different depending on where we are. You know, Blake and I, we're both here on the East Coast and I can't speak for someone from Central Desert or South Australia or WA [Western Australia] or anywhere else. You know, I can only speak for my experience and where I'm from and I know what works for us. But I'm not going to know what works somewhere else.

And that's, you know, we're talking about what the difference is. We need to be talking about place based community led kind of stuff. Not use me as a Blak person, who's trained in social work and different kind of therapies and all this stuff saying ohh, this'll what'll work for...fullas in Alice Springs, cause I don't know. I'm not there. I don't know what they're experiencing or, you know, what kind of problems they might need to address on it... on a theoretical level, I might. But in practicality and what it means to actually get people engaged and to keep them interested, like you said, don't lose that window where you've got 'em. That needs to come from community, and it needs to be led by people in community. And I think yeah, I think that's one of the issues as well with where we direct our funding to.

We fund a lot of these big kind of Christian, Catholic corporations to do work with mob, instead of funding those kind of services that are on the ground. So you've got these big kind of corporations doing this so called work and it's like people are on the ground in community, building those relationships, are fighting over crumbs and these big corporations got all this money and like they're asking the little guys to do the work because they can't engage them and it's like well stop funding them then. Give the funding to people who actually want to do the work on the ground and are letting community lead that and have a say about what that looks like.

So I think, like, in a roundabouts way, that's the difference is. Between Western models and kind of ways... and I try and move away from that, even the framing of culturally appropriate, I want something to be culturally responsive. And that means that we're not homogenising Blakfullas across the country and saying, you know, all Blakfullas need this. All Blakfullas need that or Blak services need to look like this. We're actually going, we acknowledge that there's a variety of different cultures that exist across this continent and we need to be building our services, and nurturing our services, and our communities in ways that work for our communities, not what the governments tell us what we need to do.

The state government, the New South Wales Government, for example, oversees the biggest population of Blakfullas in all of Australia. How's the state government gonna tell me what to do here in Sydney and then go out to Brewarrina and tell them what to do out there? Or out to Moree or out to Dubbo? It's gonna look completely different. So yeah, I think to answer your question in a very long winded way is, making sure that what we're doing is place based genuinely, not just saying it because it's this tag line. Doing it and meaning it and letting young Blakfullas and all the Blakfullas in communities say what needs to happen and what they want to see happen and how they get there. I think is the difference. And that's not to say that Western models don't work, because obviously talking therapies do work. We know that, you know.

We have services like 13 YARN, that's a talking therapy. We have play therapies, we have art therapies, we have equine therapies and we know that these kind of Western models and Western approaches work. It's being able to decolonize them and use our ways of knowing and doing things within those therapies, so kind of integrating them in different ways, but that can only come from mob on the ground, it can't come from even mob at a national level, you know, like we can't say in a big kind of advisory, oh this what needs to happen. It doesn't matter what we say. It matters what young Blakfullas on the ground are saying about what they need.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's right, localised community led. We saw a really good example of that. I'm from Central Desert, my family are Walpiri. When Alice Springs was getting a lot of news coverage at the beginning of this year, it was such a relief to finally see organisations like Children's Ground in Mparntwe in Alice Springs, actually given a platform to speak about those local issues. Because you're right, it doesn't work when you're not from that place, when you don't have connections to that community. There are just too many different nuances, and so yeah, no, I think once again, like the answers exist. You know there are solutions on the table, but it's how much they're being listened to.

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah. And it's interesting as well. Like conversations, I think that are starting to get big in community. You asked Blake before, you know, what are the things that you and your peers are talking about? Something that me and my peers are talking about is data sovereignty and making sure that we have access to the, to the stuff that belongs to us, you know, and it's because we have the solutions, but we actually need to know what we're working with to be able to address it you know, with the solutions that we already have in our community. So those conversations go hand in hand. And I think you know in the in that conversation about funding for services and organisations.

You have these big corporates and these big government organisations that have access to that kind of data and so they're able to fill out funding applications and stuff better than the, you know, Aboriginal organisations on the ground are able to because they don't have access to that information. So it looks better if you're someone far off in a department way away and you're just reading paperwork and figuring out who's going to get money for this grant you've got, or this big pot of money that you've got. Who's gonna get it? It's gonna be the people who look like they know what they're talking about.

So it's that whole big conversation at the moment. I think that, I don't know if young people on the ground are talking about that, but as an older young person who's like, having a look at things and going, what do we need to be doing differently and what can we kind of be advocating for? That's one of the things that we're thinking about and talking about.

RACHEL HOCKING

Are there spaces at the moment where young mob can talk about data sovereignty?

KARLIE STEWART

I personally have been involved in a couple of different things where young people are talking about that, and I won't speak to Mount Druitt because that's your area and you obviously know it better than I do, but some of the young fullas that I've worked with from out that way have been talking and being involved in conversations about that. I think particularly in the justice reinvestment space.

We're talking about data sovereignty. I know as well, like in regards to child protection and out of home care, I think that's another area that it's being spoken about. I think that the kicker is always gonna be are these people in positions of power actually gonna listen and do they care what we've got to say? That's always gonna be the end point, I think. Cause if they do then great. Just let us have access to the things that are about us. But if not, we're always going to be pushing bricks up a hill so.

RACHEL HOCKING

We're coming close to the end and I know we're chewin' up all this time so fast. Like this is what happened last time. Like we're yarnin' and we're like where has the time gone. But I do think it's important to go back to the point both of you brought up right at the beginning. You know, we're talking about not just services that exist to facilitate the healing of our mob, whether you know it's through the justice system or whatever but actually having spaces and services that are there to exist purely for Blak excellence and Blak joy. Do those spaces currently exist in your communities?

BLAKE TATAFU

Yeah, I have the privilege of working at Kimberwalli, which is the Aboriginal Centre for Excellence where I, in my role there, get to see multiple generations of Aboriginal people coming together to exercise and learn in their culture, and practise their culture. One of the things that I was very proud of establishing last year is a mens and boys didg group where we sourced all the didges ourselves, we got that all together and we had... we set that the registration was for a young person, a child, a male obviously, and they could bring a male family member that's their uncle or their dad or even, you know, if they don't have that in their family, then someone else that's close to their family unit.

And I remember one night we had, like, a full house. We had 100 participants. So, we had fifty kids plus their extra family member. And it was... that night in particular, we had four generations of a family, all there all learning to play the didg together, because those opportunities weren't available to the father or the grandfather or the uncle. So seeing that in a very small but big way that's something that I get to do that changes their history and their journey as Aboriginal men, means a lot to me. Because that's something that I didn't have either as a child. You know, something that I wish I had, but in that particular place where I'm working now, we do a lot of things where it's the first for families and we're doing it not to address a social problem or a social need.

We're doing it for the strengthening of our community connections and our culture, because that in itself will be a part of our healing and be a part of positive health outcomes for ourselves, if we remain and stay connected to the things that make us who we are. And be fearless and be unapologetically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah. Yeah. I think just having permission to just be happy, you know, having permission to just, like, take on a new skill or be around other mob and with no expectation that it's got to lead to something. There's just like learning for the sake of learning. Joy for the sake of joy.

BLAKE TATAFU

And that's right. And all of the program that we've run have been told to us by our young people. They've told us what they've wanted. And so we've made we've created it. We've piloted it, and if it works, we keep offering it until we can't offer it anymore. And then we ask our young people again. What? What, what do you need? What's going on? So the consultation that we do is endless and I think it's important because I've mentioned it before, what was good for a person that's ten years old now is different from what was good for them ten years ago. So I'm really fortunate and really lucky. And I just hope that this is something that, can be remodelled in other communities or that other communities have the opportunity to do something like this because it's not just changing the lives of individuals and communities and families.

I feel like my life is changing to it, because of it too. I get to witness cultural excellence every day and it doesn't have to be the best athlete or the smartest academic. It's looking at a five year old boy and his father learn a new cultural skill together that wasn't afforded to Dad back when old Grandpa, back then. That's what's excellent to me.

RACHEL HOCKING

Isn't it! Deadly the way you describe that, because often we have to like, when we have these services, we have to provide measures. Measures of success. And they often go against these Western markers. And it's like, what you just described? How do you measure that you know. What does that, there is no number you know that you can put on that.

BLAKE TATAFU

Well, if you do find out, let me know because I need to let Treasury know.

RACHEL HOCKING

Well I think the storytelling. I think the storytelling is a way of measuring it, you know, just yarnning, yeah.

BLAKE TATAFU

But I feel like, that's what I receive and that's what I see and I can't put it into measurement either. I can't tell you how big or how small of gratitude, of joy, that I experience when I see these things happen. Yeah, like I can't. But you know, we're fortunate to have that in Western Sydney, yeah.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's beautiful. I like that sometimes. You don't need to, you know, like you can just step back and be like, this doesn't need to have some sort of like other thing put on top of it to say it ticks these boxes that achieved.

KARLIE STEWART

Validate it.

RACHEL HOCKING

Validate it, exactly.

KARLIE STEWART

By Western measures.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, do you have places, communities, social events that just... where do you find Blak joy and excellence in your community, Karlie?

KARLIE STEWART

Well, I think I was pretty lucky to grow up with some really strong leaders in our community around La Perouse and those were older people that were going on their cultural journeys and understanding what they didn't have access to and trying to build those kind of pathways. So that their kids could have access to it, so we always grew up in a way where we were doing like cultural dance stuff and, you know, being invited to perform and all that kind of stuff, but that's gone a step further now with us as young fullas growing up, moving into new spaces and now doing things, proper cultural ways, going through ceremony and learning our laws and how they govern us and tell us our responsibilities about places.

So I'm seeing that happen a lot now and yeah, in my job, I manage alongside another deadly Blackfulla from this community. Or he lives in this community. Not from here, but we manage our Aboriginal healing program together and his stream of it is the cultural engagement side of things and these young fullas have been through their ceremony and their proper men's stuff, and they're coming back and giving back to community and teaching them... you know how to make artefacts and teach them about plants and different kind of animals and doing things proper culturally and how we did it long ago and so I think for me there's a lot of respect in community for people who are doing that kind of stuff and making sure that things are passed on the right way and how they were intended to be.

Yeah, so there's that. But then there's also the other spaces where we kind of find our joy, you know, like with Blak artists and musicians and moving into spaces that we've always kind of had access to, but I felt like it used to be a bit radical even to go to a gig or to go and perform in this space or be invited to these. It was kind of like tokenistic or a bit like left field. Now I feel like we're occupying those spaces with people like Kobe D and Barker and DOBBY, you know, people who are, you know, kind of giants I suppose at this point in time in that kind of like music scene. So I think, you know, we do

things in a cultural way, but we also can fill our cup as Blackfullas being together and just celebrating together and celebrating each other. In other ways in those kind of artistic spaces and appreciating the skills that we've been given from our old people and you know, there's that saying that goes around that, you know, my ancestors wildest dream and that's, you know, when I see people like Barkaa perform and it makes you think about stuff like that, like you've just got this gift of storytelling and yeah.

And I think that's another space where it's kind of a privilege here on the East Coast that we're afforded those things because you know, we get access to those people so much easier than mob out in, in kind of more isolated areas do. So, I feel very lucky and very privileged when I'm able to be in those spaces with other Blackfullas and celebrating. But yeah, I think there's stuff happening all over the place, there's no shortage of things that give our communities pride and joy and love and respect and celebration. Yeah. And so I think there's... I personally have felt the tide kind of shifting in the last five or six years and just before Covid, it felt like if there was this wave of like oh, it's alright to be Blak, I don't know whether that was my own personal journey as a Blak woman but.

Yeah, I don't know. It just feels like we're allowed to take up more spaces and we push into the spaces where we felt like we haven't been allowed to be before. So there's the cultural side of things and actually being Blak people and learning those traditional kind of cultural skills like you said, like all the all the knowledges. But there's also the other side of it where we just get to go and be together and celebrate in spaces that we haven't been allowed to occupy before. So yeah. Yeah, just to be ourselves and show up as who we are.

RACHEL HOCKING

Visible Blakness.

BLAKE TATAFU

Because that's excellent enough.

RACHEL HOCKING

When you were talking about, you know, all these events and, you know, feels like there's no shortage. I was thinking that, like just last month and definitely access issue I know this very well. Because, you know, not every single community has events held super regularly, but you know, here being on Gadigal Land, being in the biggest, most populous city in the continent, I get a bit spoiled sometimes and I was thinking that particularly last month when there was like a clash of three like proper Blak events on the same night, and I was thinking like 'do you mob talk to each other?! You making us choose!' But then I was like, no, this is good. We are spoilt for choice. Like I love this now. But I was also...

KARLIE STEWART

Yeah, those nights when that happens? I just stay home. I can't pick.

BLAKE TATAFU

I try to make them all. Yeah, I try to commit.

KARLIE STEWART

You've way more energy than me, then, I just I dunno. Watch it all on Instagram.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah or the live stream! Cause that's the other thing as well. Like what I really liked about Covid, who the hell has ever said that? One thing that... one of the benefits that we've learnt as I think as society after Covid is that we can make things more accessible. You know, when mob can't reach events, we can stream them and we've gotten so good at it now and it's not always the same, but tell you what, like I've had a pretty good time in my lounge rooms and streaming some concerts.

Yeah, we have chewed up so much time yarning. Thank you both so much. Like always, I just, yeah, I'll never stop learning from young mob, even though I'm only thirty myself and still consider, you know, somewhat, but I do think growing older like I'm really appreciating being connected to the younger people in my life and being pulled up and reminded about the fact that we do have to keep bringing along the people who are in those younger categories into these conversations, we can't just keep talking about young mob without young mob so, I just want to say thank you. Thank you for everything.

KARLIE STEWART

Thanks for having us.

BLAKE TATAFU

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

RACHEL HOCKING

Beautiful. Well, I'm going to wrap up now with a couple of words, so thank you for listening.

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