

## PODCAST



## Season 1 — Episode 3

## Confronting Perceptions

## JAX COMPTON

*Hello, and welcome to a special podcast series from The Healing Foundation, Healing Our Way. In this series, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share their thoughts about intergenerational trauma, healing, and the concept of truth telling. We also speak with Stolen Generations survivors and descendants about their journeys and 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 Country. We acknowledge Elders, past, present, and emerging.*

*Before listening, please take note that this podcast may touch on sensitive topics related to trauma. I'm Jax Compton, and I'll be your host for the Healing Our Way podcast.*

*In this episode, we yarn to Ellen Karimanovic and Blake Tatafu from The Healing Foundation Interim Youth Advisory Group, proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man Luke Currie Richardson, and Libby Brown from Aboriginal Counselling in Western Sydney. In this episode we'll be discussing and confronting negative perceptions and stereotypes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and how racism continues to affect us today. Hi everybody, welcome to this special podcast. Today, we're gonna be talking about confronting perceptions and truth telling really. So, I'm going to start with you, Mr. Currie Richardson. Yes. Off the bat, you're first.*

*Luke Currie Richardson is a wonderfully strong young man, a part of our community. Luke, can you tell us a bit about you and where your mob's from?*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*Oh man. First off the bat, alright, Luke Currie Richardson. I am a very, very proud Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander. My bloodlines run through many areas of this country. My father's side. I'm a Kuku Yalanji, Djabugay man, but also part of Samsep Clan from Mer on the Torres Strait. On my mother's side, I'm a Mununjali, Butchella man as well.*

*Yeah, I think it's very important to acknowledge all of them because I'm proud and I think they make me who I am today. What else do you want to know? What do I do for a living? I don't know what I do for a living. I'm just a brother trying to do his bit for our community and our mob. I guess I'm known to be a creative, but I just like to be known as a storyteller because I think... it's in our DNA, for Indigenous people. Storytelling is so a part of who we are and that's kind of what I would like to do as a storyteller, I'm not a dancer, I'm not a photographer, I'm not an actor or anything. I'm just a storyteller.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Well, it's very fitting that you're here, because that's what we're trying to do today is create this podcast and yarn together to tell a story so that someone on the other end of this podcast is listening and can hear themselves and understand that we are listening to them and they're being heard and they can relate to each and every one of us in this room. So, I want to talk to you about the phrase or the term 'truth telling', and what the term truth telling means to you?*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*Ohh yeah, truth telling, I don't know, I... as a creator I try to break down, I guess all these preconceived ideas of what society thinks something is. Your truth is different to my truth. Truth telling is different to everyone, I guess, and just for me personally it is, what is my truth? What is it that I represent? What is it that I stand for? And how do I... I guess represent that. And being sure that I'm being truthful to myself. And I think as an individual, like I said earlier, my truth is different to you and so on and so forth. But I think as a country, what is our truth? And they're very different things, so that's a quick little summary of what I guess. You know, throwing hard questions at me already, first question out the bat, oh!*

## JAX COMPTON

*Yeah look, that's what you're here for! No just kidding. But you've brought up two very good points, is that truth telling of this country, and then, what does truth mean to you individually? So I might throw to Blake and Ellen on this, what does the truth telling of this country mean? To you Blake, firstly.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*Well, it's about having ownership of our history and who we are as people. I mean in our syllabus in education, we're forever dictated by a history that isn't true, and it wasn't written by us. It certainly doesn't serve us any favours. So truth telling is being completely unapologetic and telling the truth. The real rawness of it all. And if you're uncomfortable with that. Let it soak in because that's when you start learning.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Yeess, I keep saying that I wish I could drop this mic but Ben would kill me if I started dropping this mic. Yes.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*I'll continue on that.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Yeah, go for it.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*I feel really strongly about this, and I feel like whenever I've been presented with the conflict of a stereotype, or a negative perception of who I am because of my blood, my colour, what I stand for, my pride. I always need to remember the version that they've created in their mind of who I am. It's not my responsibility. However, I'll give you the opportunity to know what that is. And I always say this, I say that we set the table to tell you the truth, it's up to you to take several seats.*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*Bang.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*I won't hold back.*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*I'll drop the mic for you.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Luke has now offered to drop the mic on behalf of you. No, that's absolutely true. And you should feel strongly about that because it's all of our truth, is what you just said. I appreciate your honesty, and it sometimes takes a lot of courage to really open up and say that out loud. Because there's been a fear of us saying that out loud, but now we are, and we're telling our story in our way. So I'm proud to hear other people saying it out loud too.*

*Ellen, thank you for being here, part of this podcast, you're such an intelligent and integral part of our community, so I appreciate you being here. So we talked about the truth telling of this country, what does truth telling mean to you individually as a person in your community and in your family?*

## ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

*Yeah, I think it is creating a bit of uncomfortability for people. I guess people aren't used to hearing the truth of this country, the past of what's happened. But I guess, what's continuing today. So I think there's so much to it. As Blake was saying about the education system has such a huge role to play in it. But we still have so much work to do then for, you know, middle age and older generations that still don't have, I guess, a true understanding of who our people are. And not taking, I guess, what the media kind of portrayal of us, which is so like necessary to overcome that which is a big challenge when we don't have such a big voice all the time.*

*Or, you know I guess it's only certain sides of our history or continuing culture that is portrayed so you know, opportunities like this to I guess really speak that truth is so essential. And I guess making sure that we are creating a better world for our future generations. I think that's the biggest part of it all is you know looking towards the future and trying to make a better place for our young mob.*

## JAX COMPTON

*And I think if we do start or continue to, as I'd like to put it, continue to keep truth telling and I'll throw this out to Luke, Blake, and Ellen is... what impacts would that continuance of truth telling have on our people and our country, both negative, and positive? Or is it just gonna be a positive thing? Tough question, I know, but that's why I kind of, or even Libby, if you wanted to step in here, Libby, thank you for being here and being part of this conversation as our health professional and someone that deals with this everyday, what did you think about what I just said?*

## LIBBY BROWN

*So for me one of the issues is that, we're going to deny the truth, and yet what we see in our communities are the results of trauma, and of the truth. You can't address the outcome without being honest about the journey. So we as people didn't wake up one day with a good dose of trauma, and grief and loss, and drug and alcohol, family violence, child protection issues, didn't just happen. There was a journey. There was, you know, from invasion and colonisation. We got to where we're at if we sugarcoat that, then, it's our fault that we're where we're at.*

*So, let's wash away the sugar coating, and let's be honest and let's share in that. How did we get to where we're at and how do we move forward in that? You can't heal something that you're going to deny is there. So look, I think it's all part of that journey, of healing, is that stripping it bare and being really honest about, how do we get to where we're at. You know, it's similar to the passive racism that we experience that, if we try to address what is passive, then we become the aggressor. You know that is what makes it so difficult. So, you know, let's call it for what it is, and let's be honest, whether it's racism or trauma or, you know the history that's got us to where we're at, unless we can strip that bare we're not really ever going to address it appropriately.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*Well said.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Yeah definitely. And I think Luke, would you say what Libby is talking about - so if we continue to start truth telling - and I know you're a very good, and I know it's a label, but, you're a very good truth teller I feel, that's my opinion. But, do you think that doing this leads us towards more negative perceptions and more stereotypes and racism? Or are you just willing to cop that in order to get to the results of actual deep, ingrained truth telling?*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*I mean I think it's our job to tell the truth. I think we have to, and, I'm willing to take, personally, I'm willing to take those negative stereotypes, you know, and to try and twist their minds, you know. I actively try not to drink, I actively try and day in, day out, breaking negative stereotypes portrayed to our people, for our people. But I think like, goin' back to the question you said before is...*

*Only for me and our people, I feel only good can come from this. I don't feel negativity could come from this. I don't think, like we're already living quite negatively within the white eye, within the white gaze. So how do we get more negative than already?*

*And all the displacement, all the rape of land and culture, we can't get any further worse than that. You know, we're still mass incarcerated, we're still getting killed by, you know, police and... but also I think if we talk about reconciliation and bringing the community and the mob in the country together I feel like truth will do that because, both sides can heal.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Do we all agree that racism is a form of trauma?*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*One hundred percent.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*You know our trauma is a product from racism. Yeah, absolutely. I like what you said like, like I find there to be a lot of hope in the way that the broader of Australia is looking at us when we are telling our own history. And we see our truth telling in all different facets.*

Whether, it's speaking into his written word, fashion, creative parts, you know our people are forever innovative, forever creative, and they're showcasing who we are in a completely different way. Sometimes you do have to massage their ego to get to the point and to get to... I don't like to do that very much. But I know that a lot of people do. I mean, you're always going to meet resistance from your oppressor. I mean, they've silenced us from our truth for so long. So when you... kind of speak back and go no actually this is what's happening. This is who we are. This is who we're continuing to evolve to be. There will be resistance, but I'm more hopeful than I am cynical. I don't deny that there'll be repercussions or negative impacts from us rising up.

## **JAX COMPTON**

What you said at the beginning is that racism is a form of trauma, or that you experienced trauma because of racism in all its forms. Cause I think that's another thing, is that racism, is it just one thing? And it comes in lots of forms. And I wanted to ask Libby what kind of impact, experiencing racism, and I'm gonna say constant racism for most of our lives, how does it affect our mental health and our well-being?

## **LIBBY BROWN**

I think it's a bit like living with family violence, really. In a large... as a society. And that it is continual. It puts us on high alert. We're looking for it. I know our young people expect it. You know, as a parent bringing up young people, I am wrestle, do I tell them to prepare for? Am I planting the seed or do I send them out unprepared and then they, you know, wish I'd prepared them?

How do we do that? How do we, how do we address it? How do we teach them to address it because it is passive. It is us that will be the aggressor. Generally what I see happen is you know, 'I'm sorry I didn't see you there', as opposed to 'we can't serve you' that kind of attitude. It rarely goes well if we attempt to address it because you know, 'why are you saying that' it makes us the aggressor. And then it's a bit like, well, you know, 'this is what I'm saying', you know, they're able to say 'this is why I have that perception of you, because now you're being aggressive and I wasn't'. So, you know that whole twisting it. And it messes with the mental health. I'm yet to know an Aboriginal person who doesn't have some level of anxiety, because we live with that day in, day out, you know?

What's going to happen when... I get on a bus? What's going to happen when... I get to work? The undercurrent, what is sometimes seen as a little comment here and a little comment there... you know I've supported a lot of people where things go pear shaped in the workplace and what it becomes is 'ohh, but that was that incident and that was that incident and that was that incident'. But they're all connected. They all have a common denominator. But you know it's pointed. Today our identity is a bit more complicated than how it used to be and so do you fit the perception? Are you too Blak for one place and too white for another?

And how do we fit in all of that? And you know, I hear that all but you don't look Aboriginal, or but you don't sound Aboriginal or you know, what do they want, really? What do we expect it to be? Can we not just tell the truth, be who we are. You know, we live in a society that likes scientific evidence, and there is no scientific evidence for it.

## **JAX COMPTON**

And I think I see it a lot in our young people. This doubt. And I know, Ellen, you worked with young people a lot in your career and... do you see some of the things that Libby was talking about in our young people?

## **ELLEN KARIMANOVIC**

Yeah, definitely. I guess there's a lot of pressure for our young mob to really rise up and overcome a lot of the stereotypes that are put on them. And as a young person, trying to find your own identity, who you are, whether you know, obviously some of our young kids are also trying to find out who they are, like who their mob are and everything as well.

So being in that world where you're not fitting in quite, you know, in the Black world or in the white world as well. That can obviously create such a clash for them when your inner system education system that is, I guess, so focused on, our dominant mainstream culture here in Australia. So I think there is so much pressure for them to kind of achieve which can I guess you know, then it starts coming out in all those anxieties, the stresses and how that's gonna impact them. You know, their social, emotional well being, moving forward, like into adulthood they're developing that from quite a young age. So unless they're then starting to be able to work on themselves, that's you know, that's going to be there for life if you're not able to heal through their own journey.

## JAX COMPTON

*As another Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander woman, I look at you and I'm actually envious of that strength, and that ability to just educate and rise above and take every opportunity to turn it around because... like we were just talking about sometimes doing that all the time can have a really heavy effect on you, and it's very exhausting. Have you found that at times you've just... it's just exhausting and that you don't actually want to do it sometimes?*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*Yeah, absolutely. I think, before I know that I'm going to enter a space where I may be challenged in that way, I do a lot of conditioning and, I kind of do some self-reflection and I don't think 'how am I best going to respond to someone's crap?'. No, I don't think like that. I think more like 'how do I meet this challenge with something that would make my Nan proud, or someone else proud? And sometimes I come off as... I might come off as really blunt, but that's what I want. I want you to listen. I want you to hear. And you know, don't internalise passive, you know lots of passive racism always comes out when I am truth telling, where my passion gets mistaken for aggression. I mean, that's a whole different subject, but.*

## JAX COMPTON

*The next podcast, yes, yes yes.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*Yeah, of course I get tired. And of course there's... I get... I don't know, there's no label for it really. I get fatigued in trying to understand why people don't understand.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Yes absolutely. And do you think our young people like, can you see it in our young people? You know those teenagers, the youth, can you see it in their eyes that... I think they're a bit fatigued sometimes in living in this crazy world with...*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*Ohh, I think all of us could probably agree that when the media perpetuates this massive negative story about someone who may or may not be Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander, everyone else in the community who now looks at you as if to say where's your comment? Where's your responsibility to clean this mess up? That's when I get fatigued.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Truth. There's a truth there.*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*That's what I was just saying out there, right? Yeah, like all this stuff that's going over in the States and people are, 'cause I've got this small following now. People are like, where do I go for this? Where I'm like I'm not the Blak Google like. How do I be the, like, a lot of white people was coming to me through, like...*

## JAX COMPTON

*It's hard, yeah.*

## LIBBY BROWN

*Like we've gotta be the expert. All the time.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*It is, when you're the only Blak person in the room, the expectations of what you're expected to give to someone else, freely, is very tiring. It's exhausting.*



## JAX COMPTON

*It's super exhausting. And it's, we may hear in our voices that we've got these giggle type things, but it's because it's such a common truth of ours. This is our reality right now, and it's kind of that overwhelming like... oh my gosh, I need to, like, come up for air. Because it is our truth. And I think one of the things that's really...*

*I want to have hope for our young people and I do. I genuinely do. I see some amazing young people every single day just rising up and willing to take on those challenges but I am worried for them. But I think what this podcast does especially, is to let them know that there are people out there just like them. And so, I'm trying to think about ways we can heal ourselves, what tips you guys have. So, I'm just gonna throw this out to you all. What tips you have on preserving yourself so that we can continue to educate, because it's a part of our reality. And I'm going to start with you, Ellen.*

*What tips you would have for young people when you see young people, what do you say to them? To say you know 'this is tough and you're living in tough situations at the moment' or 'you'll get through it'?*

## ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

*Yeah, I think just acknowledging, I guess the reality of the situation is a big part. You know sharing our stories with young people so they don't feel alone in what they're experiencing and I guess you know just having, you know giving them that strength to know that they can also take a step back. Like you don't have to always be on the front foot, having to be ready to I guess, you know, defend and everything.*

*I mean, there's obviously the place for that. But you're gonna just exhaust yourself and that's when you're starting to really, I guess, affect your soul and your spirit of what's going on around you when it impacts you so much. So, I think, you know, it's alright to take a step back sometimes and really look after yourself.*

*I guess for me that's like, you know at this point in my life that's kind of... I have done a little bit of that. Stepping back to you know, get on top of my own well-being. And I guess seeing that importance, seeing that and then coming out the other side of it a little bit now, like you know, you have that fire back in your belly and you know you're ready to take on those challenges. And having some of that tool kit off, you know those ways of self-care in your back pocket, so you know not to, like, take yourself back to those negative spaces.*

*I guess keeping on top of your well-being, I think it's so important. So... as much as there's so much negativity, you know, like through social media, it's always in our face. Or on the streets and you know seeing I guess, you know, what happens in institutions and everything else as well still, just been able to take that time to sometimes have that breather is so important.*

## JAX COMPTON

*One hundred percent agree. We gotta look after ourselves as well as our community. Does anyone else have any insights on what they do? So Ellen shared what she does for herself, or something that's been helpful to you along your journey?*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*With the young kids that I've worked with over the years, I've always said to them, never ever let anybody minimise, patronise, or take away your own truth. Because it's what you wear. You may not feel like you're wearing it. You may feel like you're naked, but we see you for who you are, and even if you're in a room full of people who reject or try to resist your culture or what you bring, or your truth. I always like to, always want them to remember their own self-worth, and there's a community where our uncles and aunties before us who've done this. And they've done it under much more harsh circumstances, and at the end of the day, we're all still united and we're all together.*

## LUKE CURRIE RICHARDSON

*The comments, the racism, and it all hurts. But know that you have the backing of 65,000 plus years like, going through the same stuff that you did, and they've got you. We've got you.*

*It is tough and tiring, but it's... like, it's the mob. It's like even in this little room. Like, I'm like, it's a safe space. I'm like I might have just met you just now but we feel like we're united as the community and... just know that you're not alone.*

## JAX COMPTON

*So Libby, we can heal from trauma, from racism, and negative perception?*

## LIBBY BROWN

*Yeah, absolutely. Look, I think the beginning of that is speaking truth. I think when... the truth is laid bare, then we start the beginning of that healing. I have no doubt at all that we're resilient people. And mob is, you know, what do they say, we have survived, you know, despite invasion, colonisation, genocide, you know, our languages have been taken and culture has been, you know, impacted.*

*But it's not gone. I say to young people all the time, you've got it in your hand because you can't see it you're giving it away, you know. Pull on those things that you know are cultural and don't let anyone else tell you what you have or haven't got. Get yourself around people that will hold you up that will support you and that'll help you heal.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Well, thank you all. Thank you so much, for being a part of this podcast. Truth telling, confronting perceptions, all those things. We are on the journey together, and I really appreciate you all. Thank you.*

*Thank you for listening. For more information, head to The Healing Foundation website at [www.healingfoundation.org.au](http://www.healingfoundation.org.au). This podcast is a 33 Creative Production recorded on Gadigal Land.*



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