

PODCAST



Season 2 — Episode 1

Make Healing Happen

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 Foundation's Youth Reference Group members and their special guests to talk about their journeys and thoughts on how we can continue to heal our communities.

To begin, we'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Lands and Waters across this beautiful continent. 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 lead intergenerational healing. Before listening, please take note that this podcast is probably going to touch on some sensitive topics related to trauma, so take care while listening. If you feel the need to speak with anyone, you can contact 13 YARN on 13 92 76. You can speak 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're going to yarn to Tarlee Leondaris, Ellen Karimanovic, and Blake Tatafu about how we can make healing happen and how everyone has a role to play. So thank you so much for joining me.

Look, I'm sure our listeners would probably prefer to hear a little bit about you from yourselves. I know I definitely would. So Blake, can you please introduce yourself?

BLAKE TATAFU

Oh, sure, my name is Blake Tatafu. I'm a proud Wiradjuri Dunghutti man, born and raised in Western Sydney. My family come from Trangie and Kempsey, and my dad is a Tongan man, so got a lot of culture within me.

RACHEL HOCKING

You definitely do. That's a mad mix. And Blake, you've actually been on this podcast before, so what does it feel like to be back today?

BLAKE TATAFU

I think being involved with The Healing Foundation for over ten years now, it's been so wonderful to see all the different talent of our young people have their voices amplified, heard and put into action. Right now, we've just had a new reference group formation and I'm really excited to do some great work with them like we're doing here today, for example. But the stuff that we get to do is probably, I don't think I could do anywhere else. And Healing Foundation's commitment to young people and to Stolen Generations survivors and members is unmatched.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's really cool, I wanted to dig into some of that deadly work you've done for more than a decade with Healing Foundation. But first, Ellen, can you please tell us a bit more about yourself?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

Yeah, thanks for having me. So I'm Ellen Karimanovic. I'm a Worimi woman and my family are from the Port Stephens area of New South Wales. I've lived and have grown up in Western Sydney as well, alongside Blake and, yeah, I'm excited to be here today.

RACHEL HOCKING

And Ellen, you've been with the Healing Foundation for a couple of years now, hey?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

Yeah. So I joined just a little bit before the Covid pandemic hit really. Yeah. So that made it a little bit difficult. We couldn't really get together as often as we would have liked to do some of the work that we do as part of this Youth Reference Group. But we did put together the first series of this podcast, which was very exciting. So, it's great to see the second season now being kicked off and having that to go out as a resource for all our mobs.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, pretty amazing achievement to have pulled off the first season of the podcast while there was a pandemic happening. So yeah, kudos and also I'm sure that it probably meant a lot to be able to have yarns with people during that time?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

Definitely that was so important. I think just keeping that connection and yeah it was an amazing experience as well. Just being in the room for those recordings, so.

RACHEL HOCKING

Amazing. And Tarlee, could you tell us a bit about yourself please.

TARLEE LEONDARIS

Sure so, thanks for having me, Tarlee Leondaris. I'm a direct descendant of the Stolen Generation, so my mum was forcibly removed from her biological mother at birth, and our mob is Warramunga from the Barkley Tableland. Mum grew up on a mission in Arnhem Land, so she's actually learned the traditional ways of the Yolngu people. And as a teenager moved to Kurna Country and that's where I was raised and grew up.

My family's multicultural. So my dad's heritage is Greek, and so I acknowledge that connection as well, and I've got two brothers who are both very proud of culture and learning, four beautiful nephews. And I have a wonderful fiancé as well, we're getting married at the end of this year. He's Italian. So, keeping the multiculturalism going.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's so deadly. I love hearing about these multicultural families. Your story in particular, Tarlee, I've got NT [Northern Territory] mob, Walpiri mob. But my stepfamily is Italian too, and it's pretty close similarities with that family vibe, hey?

TARLEE LEONDARIS

It's the family connection, and I think that's how, I think that's even how my mum and dad formed such a strong connection is that importance of family. So yeah, it transgresses culture I think.

RACHEL HOCKING

Family and eating, Tarlee you're the newest member of The Healing Foundation. You just came on board in the last few months.

TARLEE LEONDARIS

Yeah, absolutely. So I saw an expression of interest advertised through The Healing Foundation website when I was just doing some research on ways that I could do my own healing and learn more about intergenerational trauma. And it was too good an opportunity to pass up because I wanted to connect with like-minded people with similar experiences like these guys. And so far I've just had opportunities that have been so beneficial. So it's been awesome.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's deadly. So Blake, you've been around the longest with The Healing Foundation. I thought maybe you can take us on a journey, take us back to the beginning when you first came on board and how you first found out about the Youth Reference Group and what it's meant to you.

BLAKE TATAFU

Oh, I can't actually remember exactly how I found about Healing Foundation or the Youth Reference Group. I think I met someone from the from The Healing Foundation at the time, and they might have been at a workshop I was at. But the idea of learning a little bit more about the ways that we understand that things have happened to our people over time was really interesting to me.

Obviously, we've got our family yarns about our own family histories and the trauma that's associated with that, but looking at intergenerational trauma and healing was a new comment for me ten years ago, I think we were so used to focusing on the hurt and the deficit of that, and not really focusing on ways that we can heal. Still remember our past and never forget it, but find ways to heal and, you know, evolve, and bloom, and grow.

RACHEL HOCKING

That sounds like a really important moment. More than ten years ago, I think you said when you joined, so it wouldn't have been long after The Apology. Do you remember at that time when you, when you talk about, you know, hearing about intergenerational trauma and healing in the same sentence, those two things. Do you remember how it was framed to you and why it meant so much to have those things complementary to each other, rather than just focusing on trauma?

BLAKE TATAFU

Like a characteristic or a feeling that gets passed down, you know my Nan may feel some way because if something happened to her then my mum carried that behaviour or that attitude and I have a particular feeling or response that resonates with what they've gone through. And I always was really curious about that. I was always curious why there was so much secrecy around some of the things that did happen to my family. Not understanding the level and depth of hurt that you know, my strong Nan kept from us because well, for a time, just so that she could let us have healthy and happy childhoods.

Whereas our mum and her sisters they knew and they knew that feeling and experience. But we don't really expose to the hurt. We were just exposed to being proud and knowing who we are, where we come from. So as a teenager I got more curious about that because it was more around me then. I guess my peers were talking a little bit more about it. And then when the National Apology came, we were at school and we were all in the hall, we're watching it and at my school, at the time, I think there was probably about six other Blakfullas there. We just kind of looked at each other and stood up from where we were and all just sat together and watched that together and, I don't know, it meant something. It felt like something. I wasn't completely understanding what was going on, but you could feel it.

And The Healing Foundation was a result from that and the work that they do with the Stolen Generations members. And my experience with them and experience with The Healing Foundation has been life changing. It's made me look at what happened to our people, you know, in a completely different way, but it also gives me a lot of hope, into how I can do my part and hopefully share with others, my family, and my community and how we can continue to move on, to grow and continue to be strong, continue to be proud. And focus on a better future.

RACHEL HOCKING

I can really feel like, how much it means to you and in your voice. You know, like, there's clearly such a depth of meaning that has left such a mark on you. I mean, you came in a couple of years ago, Ellen. So, what was going on for you in your life when you walked in the door of The Healing Foundation?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

There's a lot going on in the background I guess, family things for me. So my great grandmother when she had not long had my Nan, she had to leave the mission to go down to the hospital with my grandmother and she was sick for a little while. They had to stay there.

But then they got the phone call to not come back up to the mission because yeah, I mean the police had come through and removed her younger siblings. So they had to stay in the Newcastle area, Port Stephens, and I think... I guess for me, sitting down with family, hearing those stories, you know, you can just see how much that impacted on the family. But then also seeing the resilience and the strength that's come through. That is just beautiful. And I think for me, like losing my Nan in 2018, that was probably, yeah, just that little bit before joining this group I guess it's just carrying on their spirits still and the impacts that I guess that the family went through of, you know that disconnection there at that point in time and then, you know, like my family will tell us that it's probably about forty years later, once my great grandmother got to reconnect with some of her siblings so.

Yeah. Long time between being able to be connected to family and then for me, I guess, like my mum, wasn't removed, but she was adopted out of the family so, that reconnection, that journey as well, back to culture and Country. It's just, yeah, it's so important. I guess it's twofold for me. Having that, I guess the impact of policies from the stolen generation, but I guess more that contemporary feel as well, which kids are still going through today.

RACHEL HOCKING

Thanks for acknowledging that Ellen and sharing so much of your story as well. It is important to talk about the fact that it's not completely in the past, you know? And we talk about colonisation often, it's an ongoing event. It's not something that happened in 1788 and then stopped. So, Ellen, when you first came to The Healing Foundation. Do you remember your first impressions coming and meeting the Youth Reference Group?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

Yeah, I mean, I was excited. I already knew Blake. We went to university together, lived like, just down the road from each other, basically. Yeah. So like, I already had a strong connection going into the group. So I guess that just made me feel comfortable straight away coming into it. And yeah, just the passion behind some of the staff that were there. I mean yeah, it's hard to explain the feeling. But you just felt safe. And that I was joining a really positive group of people to, yeah, be able to make change and I guess it's turning, like Blake said, a lot of the talk and everything around, you know, Blakfullas in general, but particularly with Stolen Generation, I guess is a lot of the hurt and trauma which we definitely have to acknowledge. But for us, it's also breaking some of those, the intergenerational impacts and really looking to healing and just seeing our people thrive. Like at the end of the day we just want to have that impact on the next generation to just keep going and keep our culture strong. And yeah, that's exciting to be a part of that.

RACHEL HOCKING

It's exciting for me to witness. I want to talk a bit more about how you go about, you know that healing process as the Youth Reference Group but Tarlee, do you remember when you joined a couple of months ago. What was going on for you in your life and what it meant to you?

TARLEE LEONARIS

Yeah, absolutely. So, I think I've been on a healing journey myself and some of it, what I'd say, a lot of it relates to intergenerational trauma. And it's been good to put a name to that because I think we live especially growing up with these feelings of disconnection. But we don't really know what to call it. So I was in a healing journey at the time and saw the opportunity and it really is just an opportunity for me to connect with culture, and connect with other mob basically. So having been directly impacted by the Stolen Generation and mum being removed from her culture, we look for opportunities like this to connect with other mob and I think a common theme that will come up in this podcast is that First Nations people aren't homogeneous. And I think that's a really important theme. But somehow, I think a lot of us are spiritually connected.

And so to connect with other mobs is really important. So this was just another opportunity to do this and I have to echo what both Blake and Ellen have said is that the staff, absolutely wonderful. So I think sometimes as First Nations people we're put in situations where either workplaces or community groups want us to share our story for free. And often that comes with sort of a re-trauma, being retraumatized in a sense, because every time we tell that story, we sort of give a piece of us away. And it's so wonderful to feel in a culturally safe and culturally supportive, culturally sensitive place. And even when we came in today there's counsellors available for us to yarn too, if we need to.

So I really wanna, yeah, acknowledge Healing Foundation for taking those steps. So, as a new person joining, I certainly feel comfortable. It was of course a bit of a head spin when you first joined and you're in a long meeting and trying to work out what the foundation is actually doing, but as I've come to read more resources and listen to the first series of Healing Our Way, it's become really evident to me how important the work of The Healing Foundation is, because I do believe like those impacted by the Stolen Generation are still the gap within the gap of First Nations people. And the work is really important to help others out there realise that intergenerational trauma or trauma for our Elders is a thing and we need to resource that and break these cycles of trauma as well with the younger mob yeah.

RACHEL HOCKING

You touched on something that I think is so important Tarlee. And that's the agency in storytelling. We know storytelling is in our blood, our ancestors been doing it for millennia. First journalists, that's what I like to say, you know, and what has often happened, you know, and especially in the last hundred years as people have told stories about us, without us, there's been, you know, a lot of interest, a lot of curiosity about us mob but.

Often not the... people not giving us the tools to do it on our terms to do it in our way. And so it is really nice being in these spaces being, you know even reflecting on like the lead-up to this podcast and just how important I could see it was to The Healing Foundation for youse to have the agency to be able to look over everything in the content, I think it makes me think about this type of storytelling that we're seeing more and more of maybe as a result of more, more mob podcasting in their homes and yeah, making TikToks and stuff like that. Like we're seeing our voices come out more. And have you had any moments, Blake, since the first season of the podcast where you've been able to reflect on what it means to have your voice out there on a platform to be able to tell your story your way?

BLAKE TATAFU

So the first season, that we recorded a few years ago, we did that during Covid and I think Covid really forced everyone to really do some self-reflection. I think for me a part of my career goals and a personal goal is to make sure that someone or something is better after I've engaged with it. So if I first walk into a place and I'm working in a business, I want to leave knowing that I've made it better. And that comes down to youth participation. Like when I think of our young mob and the opportunities that can be there for them, I feel like I'm not answering this properly actually, but it's, they deserve to have the right to make decisions that affect them. And our young mob are constantly talked about and we're always a good selling point for any elections. But you know, our young mob need that sense of agency and they need to have their own platform to let everybody else know in this country what they need and what works for them.

Things that we discussed and talked about when I first joined The Healing Foundation with our young mob is completely different now and I think the continuation of having our young people heard will only add strength to the outcomes that we do for them. That's what I love about The Healing Foundation. I know it sounds like a plug, but they really do care about keeping current and consistent and working with youth led solutions that come from their voices. You know I can't, my community might be me and I might be my community because that's where my heart is. But I don't speak for them and I don't want them to speak for me. Our young people have that voice and, you know, going for so long without having any interaction with people during Covid made me realise how important it is for our young people to have their own sense of agency and their own determination for their own self-worth because it is adding to that resilience of our people. Young people deserve to be empowered. They deserve to be heard, and they deserve to make the decisions around them that impact their lives.

RACHEL HOCKING

Well said hey, your voices matter. Another part of storytelling is that it is intrinsically connected to truth telling. And Ellen you reflected quite a bit on this in the first season of the podcast, which I've got to say, I found it really powerful a lot of what you had to say and there was one quote that I've just got here, you said 'the importance of truth telling is creating a bit of uncomfortability for people, people who aren't used to hearing the truth about this country'. So for you Ellen, why is that uncomfortability so important for non-Indigenous people to sit with?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

I think for us, as you know, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people community is everything and I guess that communal approach to how we do handle things. So I think for us being in this nation on, you know on unceded country, we need non-Indigenous people to come in and be a part of that healing journey as well. That is going to be, you know, having uncomfortable conversations and sitting in feelings that people might not understand. But that's, I guess, you know, just part of only a small part of the journey that we've been through as Blakfullas and I guess people just need to be able to come to the table just to be able to have some of these conversations, listen to stories, and I guess just seeing the lifelong impacts that you know, the past has had on our people and that it's generational.

You don't just forget about what's happened in the past. And particularly for us, you know, we value that, very strongly, of what our families have been through and I think everyone can take a sense of pride in, I guess, seeing that journey of people and our families, all of our mobs being able to have that resilience to still come through and you know, there are so many achievements and things to celebrate within our communities still.

You know, despite some of those hard hitting things that have happened in the past and still continue. But yeah, I think for us we need kind of, everyone to be around the table and listen to our voices young and old, our Elders, but as well as our youth and be able to hear exactly what is needed in the moment, because that's always going to continue to change so just continuing to show up for us.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, that's it hey? You really hit the nail on the head. And that uncomfortability, acknowledge it, sit with it, but it really is very small in comparison to what we're talking about. And so it's not a big ask, you know, sit there, be a little bit uncomfortable and then reflect on how that is just a small, small piece of what the people sitting across from you are probably feeling. I want to ask you about those conversations Tarlee, because I've heard you talk about invisible armour.

TARLEE LEONARIS

Sure. Yeah so when I say invisible armour, I think it's something that a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people put on when they go and face the world and it's invisible because as I mentioned before, we're not homogeneous. So we all look different. We have different skin colours and we come from different groups and we have different values and ideas.

And so like, certainly in settings I've been in, people don't recognise me as being an Aboriginal person. And then I've heard every derogatory comment under the sun and I think we all have, in different ways. So you put on that armour so that you can face the day and you can function normally, because you know in pretty much any setting you're in, you're going to encounter it.

And I would really like to say you get used to it, but you don't. It breaks you down every time you hear those derogatory comments. And sometimes you work so hard in life, like I've worked in life to get promotions at work or to go up a hierarchy at work, and you think just, if I'm not at the bottom anymore, I go up and up and up, it will stop, but it doesn't. Sometimes, you know that racism exists at the top of a hierarchy in a workplace. And so you put on that armour so you can function and often other people don't see it. And I feel like it's also been unspoken for many years as well until we do this sort of resourcing. And so, it's the invisible armour because others don't see it. It's not spoken about, but we wear it. And you know, there are places where we can take it off and we can have those culturally safe places. But often by the time... I know for myself, you're often broken once you get to that place and take that armour off and so you have to engage in healing and healing appropriately as well.

RACHEL HOCKING

A really powerful picture you just painted.

BLAKE TATAFU

Yeah, I've never heard it like that before and it's interesting to me.

Because I think that I do that subconsciously all the time, I either filter or mentally redress myself before I go into a space. If I know I'm going into a space where I feel like there's not going to be any of our mob there, I need to change the way I do something, I will subconsciously, I don't know, I feel like I protect myself.

TARLEE LEONARIS

You can even change the way you talk or act because you have because you're in that environment in that sense and I don't know about you two, or us three like, there's been places where I haven't want to go because I've experienced, and sometimes it's in social settings, and I can come across as anti-social for not wanting to go, but, I can't expose myself again to that trauma of hearing even just a single comment because you know those same people are going to be there and they hold those same values and it can affect your everyday life in that sense, especially if it's in a workplace or amongst a group of friends, and you know one friend just, you know, keeps that behaviour going.

There are opportunities for education and to educate these people, that do this sort of, I would call it - some of it is ignorance. Like I don't always know if it's pure racism. And I think there are opportunities to educate and speak up. But sometimes we're so disempowered when you're the only one in the room, it is really hard to speak up.

BLAKE TATAFU

Yeah. No, I'm like that. And I'm thinking well, that's what a lot of our young people who I work with, where I come from, experience. That's why they don't show up. Or, that's why they don't participate. They're too shamed. I know for myself that if I've gone into any big work meetings that're professional. I know that the last thing that walks through the door to these people is my intelligence and what I've got to say. The first thing they see is big Blak man walk through the door and I could be dressed in the most finest of clothes, bling everywhere. I could be the boss of the company, but it's my Blakness that walks through the door first. And it always will be, because that's who I am. But you just know that you mentally prepare for the response to that based on what we've experienced and I guess the resilience building that we do and when we talk about intergenerational healing is we touch on that. And that is something that we address and it's important that people know that that's not what we do and...

RACHEL HOCKING

That's right. I think what's interesting is like when you do have that armour on right, whether you know you're going into a really white space or whether you know you're about to have like one of those yarns with, you know, where you got to back yourself or put your first foot forward. Often what they see rather than that invisible armour, are the stereotypes. You know, angry black woman comes for me, or real quiet one, or real moody one but what they don't see is that's part of the protection right?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

I think as well just not seeing how heavy that weighs. That armour on like constantly because you don't know sometimes. Spaces... they can change very quickly as well. You could have a safe space and then things can take a spin, and yeah, all of a sudden have to kind of... yeah, protect yourself. Look after your cultural safety. And yeah, sometimes that means leaving the room as well.

TARLEE LEONDARIS

Totally. I totally agree, Ellen and I've had that where I thought someone was trusted and in my corner. And then they became ones that sort of, you know, engaged that behaviour or the ignorance or the passive racism whatever we want to call it. And that's almost more hurtful because it's hard to enter that safe space and think it's ok and then that gets taken away and that's really, again it's traumatising.

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

Yeah of course.

RACHEL HOCKING

It's really interesting hearing like, how connected I feel to this yarn. But how connected youse all are talking about this. This concept of the armour that we wear. Have youse ever spoken or had these conversations with your parents or grandparents generations?

TARLEE LEONDARIS

To be honest, for years I haven't because I almost think that's retraumatising to my mum and sometimes I enter the conversation with yeah, even my siblings, I don't wanna traumatise them with it. It's so unspoken and I think that's the deep hurt of it in that sense as well. But it's really in forums like this, where I feel connected and comfortable to talk about it, or yeah, with other mob as well.

There was an Elder in my workplace when I was in policing and I spoke to him about it and his name was Uncle Frank and he is just a wonderful, wonderful person. And I just remember he gave me the word. I mentioned it before, ignorance, and that really helped me because at that time as a young person and new in that sort of environment and a policing environment in my early twenties I just thought everyone was racist and that's not helpful as well because it makes you that angry Blak person or whatever you want to say, angry Blak woman and you don't want to be that either because that closes relationships down too. But he gave me the word ignorance, he said. They're not all racist. They're ignorant. And I think that's true. You don't know what you don't know. And that's where that again, this sort of resourcing is important, not just for First Nations people, but to help non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people realise, like our stories. And I think that's really important.

RACHEL HOCKING

Uncle Frank sounds deadly. This is a big question, and you know answer it in whichever way you feel comfortable. It might just be a small thing, it might be one little thing or it might be that bigger picture stuff. But how do you imagine intergenerational healing?

And I mean this in like, you know, real speculative, like, let's think of a future that could exist not that's going to exist necessarily based on how we're going, what does intergenerational healing look and feel like to you in that world?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

That is big question, I guess... so for me, I would say it as places being well resourced. So whether that's workplaces, education, you know that's all the way from early childhood into vocational, higher education as well. Having everyone come along on our journey like I was saying before, everyone to kind of have responsibilities, sitting at the table in knowing the history of this country and having a more in depth understanding will, for them bring out a better understanding, but more attachment and I guess having the purpose of how their role in our journey will help in that intergenerational healing, and I guess for us, we're always looking to our future generations of how we can make this a better and safer place for them. So I think that's one of the biggest ways is through education, is creating that change.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah people picking up what knowledge has been put down for a long time, hey? And finally engaging with it.

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

Definitely. Yeah. And I think I guess things like this podcast or using different platforms to continually put out those resources. I guess a lot of these conversations probably aren't new. There's stuff that would have happened, you know, over decades and have been put out in different platforms, but I guess just continue to make it in different ways that people engage with at the time. And I guess there's so much change with technology and everything, so it's, I guess, us keeping up with the pace and being able to deliver those in different ways. Yeah, for people to engage in, in the content that we have to offer and listening to our stories and the journeys that our people have gone through. Yeah, that's it.

RACHEL HOCKING

And like you said, like that content, a lot of it's out there and it's strong and it's powerful you know our mobs have been so generous with sharing and we talked about this with that trauma load that comes with having to share the story and that is for the benefit of firstly, for a sense of healing. But also to educate other people. And it's important that non-Indigenous people who haven't been on this journey understand what a gift that is.

And how grateful they should be for the generosity that comes with, with sharing so much. I saw quite a few nods as you were having a yarn there, Ellen, about the importance of education, bringing everybody along. And so for you, Blake, what do you see? What does intergenerational healing look and feel like?

BLAKE TATAFU

It's a really big question that has a lot of thoughts for me. Like, I think intergenerational healing for me, besides that word being a mouthful, is just seeing our people and our really diverse culture across the country represented everywhere. I want to see all our languages being preserved, restored and demonstrated across all we do. I want to see our health targets for close the gap be complete. I want to see no Aboriginal suicides across this country. Yeah. I can't even tell you what that end looks like, but I can tell you the feeling of working towards it and that feeling when you're with your mob, when you're with community.

Whether it's for a special event or even just a good yarn catchup, it's that feeling I want to hold and then have that spread across time because that's how I heal. Is when I'm with my family, or even when I'm with my community that helped raise me. And it doesn't have to be for a special event it could just be a get together. It's just that sense of belonging and I would like to see that all of our people belong to this country no matter where they come from in everything that they do. Representation matters. You know, I want our young people to look at the TV, look through magazines, I guess magazines aren't a thing anymore, I want them to look wherever they look, and that that's ok for them to be them. One hundred percent, without any conditions, without any filtering, without any trying to comply with some type of social standard. This is your home. And you are who you are and that is beautiful.

RACHEL HOCKING

And when you said that you know... you can't even picture what the end might be. Maybe that's because there isn't an end? You know, maybe it's continuous. That's what I feel sometimes in my heart.

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

I was thinking the same it's it's a continual journey. Yeah. And it's gonna continue too change.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, what about you Tarlee?

TARLEE LEONDARIS

I definitely echo what's been said and the continuous journey. I think what I can add to it is that my journey to intergenerational healing has been deeply personal, and I had to enter it when I was ready. So I think it's a matter of timing as well. So, I did a practise, a trauma informed practise called Dadirri, which it probably very familiar to some, but it's been... Yeah I was fortunate enough to go along to a course led by a very reputable First Nations business, and it was basically deep listening to myself and what was around me, and it was also a form of narrative therapy where I could see my narrative in the past, in the present and in the future.

So I think that's that continuous story we just spoke about, but I could also see that my mum's trauma of being taken away and living on a mission and then having to relocate to suburbia, all the trauma that came with that. And she was born in the sixties. So in the seventies, she experienced racism at school and I talk about the invisible armour, but hers had to be very... the racism she experienced was a very visible sort of thing. And so I learned in that narrative therapy that her trauma had become my trauma.

And that's what I think when we talk about the young mob. That's what we want to stop. And I can see it within the next generations that that trauma continues unless you can address it. But it's not always addressable by the dominant culture. Like we sometimes have to undertake a practise like Dadirri and to be able to come to a connection with our spirituality and our ancestors and what that all means to us. So I'm happy to share a personal story about it, which is like, my mum's a wonderful artist like wonderful, has done, like many murals and things like that. I just never appreciated it because I went to university and I was, you know, very academic in a sense, not really compared to these guys but I was thinking for a long time - I hope my mum forgives me like I thought I was superior. Because she was an artist and I was, you know, I was able to, you know, go all the way through school and she couldn't because of, like, all the trauma she experienced.

When learning Dadirri was the first time I ever picked up painting. I had seen my mum paint before and I'd seen the products of her work, but I just picked it up and just started painting and it was if, like I can only explain it as if the ancestors were like guiding me on what to paint. And that has become my biggest outlet like it's my biggest outlet and it's been the one thing like I can connect with my mum over that brings us so spiritually together and it's just healing for me like when we talk about taking off that armour. Like what's something I do to go away and just to be in my safe place, it's painting. And I never, ever thought I was creative enough or anything like that, and it just showed me, like how smart my mum was.

Like to be able to create, like, such an intricate artwork like she does. And just to see it and think, wow and we do dot painting cause that's what she learned, but it's just the way I've learned it is it's always the story that, I put the dots on the canvas, but it's the story in the spaces of the dots that you see. And so I just love creating things and saying to, you know, people close to me, but also like colleagues and things like that, like, see your story through the spaces. And it's just something that we connect over, like people that have never been exposed to any sort of Aboriginal culture before.

Just connect over, you know, painting and art, so it's meant so much to me, so much more than anything academic, so much more than any other achievements in the workplace or career or whatever, is just to be able to create something and create something with my Mum is so important and we'll continue to do something. It's just something that will never get taken away from me.

RACHEL HOCKING

It's really beautiful and it's just really nice to hear. I think just so empowering when we can actually reflect really honestly and say, ok, you know what? I did have a bit of a prejudice at one point in my life. I definitely did, definitely had some prejudices that I had to, like, check myself on and be like, ok, this is the colony at work and my appreciation for a certain hierarchy of knowledge, institutions and universities. That's been put on me. But that's not in my blood and learning that we have university under the trees, you know, learning that these yarns, this is our university. It's a really nice way to just rethink the world hey?

TARLEE LEONARIS

Yeah, absolutely. That is for me, like, that's pure intergenerational healing. And if we could get the young mob to continue to experience this, I think like all the targets we spoke about and you don't have to ever take our words for the statistics like, read any government support the gap is in there sort of thing. But I think if there was resourcing like Ellen spoke about. And this sort of culturally appropriate resourcing, I think we would see a difference in community, but it takes it takes, you know, people making decisions to be able to invest in that and to have the Elders that are able to share that and connect with young mob as well. And so it's really an interwoven process, but I really believe that the culturally appropriate intergenerational healing is really important.

RACHEL HOCKING

And you know, some of the most powerful spaces I've been in have just been those ones that have all Blak, young mob and I'm seeing more and more, you know we've got Seed mob. Some of the power summits coming around the country and even little camps like I'm seeing a lot of youth organisations throwing retreats for just young mob where that is a space that they're now being proud to say we can own.

We don't have to invite you in just yet. This is for us. What are the collective power spaces that you're in look like for you? Like what which spaces do you feel most strong and proud and...?

BLAKE TATAFU

Mine would be definitely my community, and even where I work. Because where I work was founded by the community. So I work at Kimberwalli, which is the Western Sydney Centre for Excellence, and that came about from an election commitment, you know, a few years ago. But it was the Aboriginal people in Western Sydney that pushed that to be created, they wanted a space that would become a legacy for Aboriginal people in Western Sydney to focus on the empowerment through employment, through education, through community and through well being.

So I get to see my community every day in all different facets. I specialise working with children who've gone through child protection system and have their own... And that's its own issues of trauma that we work with in a positive, transformative way. But I guess in the same sense I'm grounded by my community. I'm loved by community and I'm accountable by my community, so I feel the most powerful when I'm with them.

RACHEL HOCKING

Accountability is a powerful thing hey. When you know that it's not just don't do the wrong thing because you shouldn't do the wrong thing, but because my old people, my ancestors, have higher expectations of me. You know? That there is a collective at play, not an individual, and we gotta be thinking always about each other.

BLAKE TATAFU

Absolutely. Like I've got my Elders looking at me, but I also have the young ones looking at me too. And I need to be the best that I can be for both of those groups. Accountability is nice. It's comforting... a lil bit stressful. You know who you're doing it for, know what you're doing.

RACHEL HOCKING

And I think when you show up to the table, when you when you show up to be accountable. That is respect. That's building respect. You know when you say look shouldn't have done that. I'll do better next time. Better than just pushing it under the table.

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

And I think when you don't even have to have those yarns, you know like of your Elders upping you because, you know, maybe something, you know, you're not going on your journey, that they kind of want to see you go on. You begin to start pulling yourself up when you just, you have those reflections and you start to think, ok, I need to take a step back and kind of reground myself and yeah, get back into pulling back those layers doing just what we need to do as a people and I guess that's, you know, it's built into us of always look into the next generation.

I know for me like now I've got a little nephew so I'm just, so much focus on you know, I want to be a strong Blak woman for him and to, like, continue our culture and that pride into our next generation. So yeah, just that constant reflection. It definitely becomes a part of you.

RACHEL HOCKING

That's it hey, I think you've mentioned the same Tarlee with your brothers?

TARLEE LEDONDARIS

Absolutely yeah. Brothers and nephews. So similar to Blake, but mine would just be more insular. It's I think there's a hunger for the young people to learn, like they're empowered through program at school and they wanna learn culture. But we know the historical disconnection. And it's up to our generations to be able to keep that going and forge those connections so. Yeah, being with them empowers me because I see their passion for it. And I think if you're passionate, you've got to, you're looking at your Elders and you're looking at those above you for direction.

And so even engaging in a process like this where I can learn more and share that with them and encourage them to join similar reference groups. Is where I feel empowered, you know?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

Kind of spark something for me too, I'm thirty I know, like I guess I'm not quite a young person anymore. But there is a really important role for us to play sitting in this kind of middle ground of a lot of people around us were denied access to their culture, being able to practise it, having pride in their identity and then for us, we're seeing the young people behind us really wanting to connect.

And have those conversations reengage with their culture, which is amazing to see. And I feel like we do have like this bridging that falls on us a lot because we're kind of in this middle place that we need to, you know, step up to the plate to bring that to our young ones. And do proud and do good by our Elders as well.

RACHEL HOCKING

Yeah, I might ask you just one more question then just building on that because I think it's a really powerful image you know, being that bridge. But it's also, that's a huge responsibility, right? So how do you each protect yourselves and look after yourselves in that, is it this? Is it this space that you get that from?

ELLEN KARIMANOVIC

This is definitely, I mean, yeah, a very healing space. And I guess being seen and heard, I guess makes a huge difference. I can say personally like it has helped me along my journey of stepping out into like who I am more. And I guess that does come a little bit with age. And being comfortable in who you are and also just being grounded in experiences that I've gone through and how that kind of shapes who you are as a person to, you know, build that strength of, I guess obviously our traumas and histories that we've gone through brings a lot.

You know it is heavy, but I guess you can see also the strength and how you build from that and continue. So for me, I'm very mindful of you know I see a psychologist regularly. You know being in spaces like this, I find that very therapeutic as well, but also just taking that time out, connecting with family and you know and Country as well. Like Tarlee said, sitting down kind of doing art, something like that, that you're just able to... for me sitting by the water on the beach. You know, that's very healing for me. Just to you know, have your feet in the sand and be around the water so I guess just be mindful of some of those things that really lift your spirit, recharge you, and keep that fire burning.

RACHEL HOCKING

And what do you do to look after yourself Blake?

BLAKE TATAFU

To think about it like I'm really spontaneous and impulsive. So if I know that I need to take care of myself I'll jump in my car and I'll go for a six hour road trip.

RACHEL HOCKING

I love that. I love that.

BLAKE TATAFU

For myself, I'll feel all the elements of the air and the water wherever I go to. I know how to look after myself. And that's one of the ways I do it. But just being connected to the people that I love and knowing what they're doing, seeing how they're doing, because if they're eating well, they're doing well, I'm doing well. So I love to be around that. I always talk about my community, so I feel like that sounds like a broken record now, but it truly is like I think even when we see the Youth Reference Group like in person, when we come together, that's another way I look after myself.

Because I enjoy everybody. I'm learning about other people and their experiences. In fact, I'm richer in knowledge now because I've met all these people and that adds to my self-care. And look, I won't lie, I like to indulge in a lot of sweet treats as well. I do what it takes, and not everyone knows what works for them. But yeah, for me it's just being around the people I love and it doesn't have to be too much. It doesn't have to be fancy or formalised.

It's kind of just checking in. You know, like for me, you know, I remember there was a time I was going quite low. Like, there's a lot of pressures at work and a lot of things going on, you know people know what that's like. One afternoon after work, I just went straight to my nan's house and I laid in the lounge and I didn't leave until the next day. And I felt great. Because she was there just yarnin' and we're just talking there and it wasn't serious. It wasn't deep. It was just being with my nanna and without it, I guess, without knowing, like, just being there made me feel better.

And this is one of the many ways. Like I'm a big lover, like I'm a bit of an empath like I connect with people a lot. And I guess that's why I'm in the profession I'm in as a social worker. So when I'm with the people I love yeah. That's what makes me feel good.

RACHEL HOCKING

They feed you and that's beautiful. Thank you Blake. What about you Tarlee?

TARLEE LEONDARIS

No, I don't think I can say it too much better than what these guys said, but I just agree a hundred percent with everything, just too lazy to drive six hours that's all. Yeah, a hundred percent I think support network is a big one and I think surrounding yourself with people that encourage your culture and identity and I find it can really be helpful to be around non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people that encourage identity and want to learn about culture because that builds you up as well. So, I don't think there's anything wrong with calling people of different cultures your support network, but certainly family as well because we're intricately connected.

But yeah I just really want to emphasise what Ellen had said about seeing a psychologist. There is absolutely nothing wrong with seeing a psychologist or a counsellor to help with this, like life is stressful enough. But when we add, like we spoke about the trauma, the armour on top of it, sometimes you just need someone to yarn to and help you to offload some of what you're thinking and help you reorganise your thoughts or give you strategies to deal with life. And I really encourage that, and I see a councillor myself for these reasons and that's been very helpful to the healing journey as well.

RACHEL HOCKING

I totally echo these thoughts and I think you know, something a lot of mob says, it takes a while sometimes before you find a therapist who's the right fit for you and it can be really easy to stop after you try that first time.

But if you yarn with your friends and your family, you'll find somebody who has connections and it's hard to keep asking, but you know, keep going. There are good ones out there, they're good therapists for us out there.

I just want to thank you all. I've learned so much in this hour, yarning with you and it's been a pleasure.

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