

## PODCAST



## Season 1 — Episode 1

## Intergenerational Trauma

## 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 speak to Stolen Generation survivor, Uncle Michael Welch, and his son Bobby Dixon. We yarn to Auntie Leslie Franks, Team Leader of the Kin Connect program, at Kinchela Boys Home, and Blake Tatafu, a member of the Healing Foundation Interim Youth Advisory Group.*

*I'm very excited today because we have an opportunity today to speak to some amazing people. And these people have wonderful stories, wonderful experiences and I want you all to try and open your ears and listen and open your hearts and listen to these stories. These true stories, these real stories as we heal together, as we learn and we understand about our past, in ways of making a better future. First thing I'd like to introduce, the wonderful Uncle Michael Welsh. How are you Uncle?*

## UNCLE MICHAEL "WIDDY" WELSH

*I'm good. Very good. Thank you.*

## JAX COMPTON

*That's good. That's good. It's so wonderful to see you.*

## UNCLE WIDDY

*It's good to be here.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Always an honour to hear your story. I know of your story, but I know a lot of our listeners do not. And so, I wanted to ask first of all, if you could share a bit about yourself and a bit about your story with all of us here in this room, and also listening to this podcast.*

## UNCLE WIDDY

*My name is James Michael Woody Welsh I'm #36. Each one of those names identify myself, and a period of time in my life that I went through. I just would like to take the moment to say that, I share my respect to the people of this Land that we are on here, Gadigal Land. And I am a Wangaaybuwan man of the Wailwan Nation, a survivor of the Kinchela Boys Home AC and very pleased to be here. I am one of seven children that was taken away from my mother. I was eight years of age at the time.*

*So I had the chance to have the pleasure and enjoy memories of dancing around the campfire with my pops, and my uncles and aunties, and mum... until the time that they come and removed us. Me and my elder brother finish up in a place called Kinchela Boys Home. The word homes we don't like, it was never a home. It was as cruel place... an institution.*

## UNCLE WIDDY

*We spent some years there... the trauma that the programming of our brains that they did to us. Because they clearly told us that they wanted to make us white, that we're no longer Blak anymore for whatever reason or purposes... that I still don't understand. As I grew up from there, I couldn't understand what was happening to me in my body. My mind was one way, my heart was another*

way. So when I turned 18, I turned to alcohol to try and kill some pain that I didn't understand. My mum sadly passed away at the age of 52. My older brother, 43. So I have travelled the journey being the oldest in my family for quite a few years. As my children come along. I can see that they were treated differently. The same as what happened to myself. When you remove a child from a family, you break the dynamics and temperament of that child. You remove them from the community, you break their temperament and dynamics of that community. So when we went back after what they'd done to us, we didn't fit into that spot where we normally would've. We couldn't enjoy the same stories of sitting around with the friends, talkin about going fishin, pig catchin and all that type of things.

So we're, we're outside, we're alien to all that. So this come across, and it turned into anger. It's my anger then. All I want to do is protect my children. My protection to my children created another wall around them... to where they couldn't or didn't fit into the community, society, and social life like normally families do. I turned to alcohol, forty odd years of drinking. In the jail system, lucky to have all the children, that they love me.

I had to find something different, that was going to change that. I realise now, the change had to be me, it had to come from inside of me. The journey where I'm on now is... a beautiful journey. Still painful. But the future for my children lies in the hands of the generational trauma that needs to be explained.

### **JAX COMPTON**

That was beautifully articulated. It's wonderful. It's like you said, a painful story, but it's so truth telling. And it's so real. And we are still healing from all of these situations and experiences that we all go through. But you did talk about your children, and your love for your children. And we're very excited to have your son here, Bobby. Hi Bobby. How're you going?

When you hear your dad talk, I mean I know how it makes me feel and I'm not related although I want to be related to you. How does that make you feel when you hear your dad yarn like that?

### **BOBBY DIXON**

Ohh, it makes you... you know, it makes you sad and angry, you know I mean, like, mix of both. Of course you know you don't like to see him cry but what he talks about is... still goes on you know I mean? It's still, it passes on through and....

### **UNCLE WIDDY**

I just wanna say from a defence of my son he doesn't need his very strong man, but I couldn't talk like this even for a lot of years. And this is where the pain was. I couldn't talk about this to my children. And well, I use it as an example of, when I got my muscles in my body and I turned 18, I said nobody's ever gonna tell me what to do again.

And that... seemed right to me. But that was wrong for my children because I then put things around them, like an umbrella. And I wouldn't let the doctors take- put them in the hospital. I wouldn't let people babysit them. Even at sometimes, I wouldn't even let them go to school because of the fear of that they're not coming home.

So this is where my son Bobby at his age now is, is where I was. And to get it up and to come out to talk about it, it took a lot of time, in and out of the jails, in and out of the court houses, a lot of pain of anger, and fighting and all of that type of thing. Which they watched and seen. And they have grown. They have a great talent of their own and that's what I'm trying to get to come forward from them.

### **JAX COMPTON**

So when you hear your Dad's story, or stories like your Dad's, how has it had an effect on you or your generation or... people of your age group?

### **BOBBY DIXON**

Made us angry towards white people because seeing the way they treated Dad and the way we were treated too, you know like... even the police, you know I mean like, they treated us bad too, you know like?

Just kind of growin up there in a hard place, made us strong but also, put us in a lot of danger most of the time. So we kind of went towards gangs, you know, we kind of created our own to try to protect one another. It wasn't really more like a gang, more like a family, you know? I mean like, lot of cousins, and brothers, and all kinda stick together and we defended ourselves like that. But I mean, you got no chance when you handcuffed or anything like that.

*It's hard like, especially when you try to talk, and like me and my brothers, we're singers, we love singing. But I wish I had the guts that my brothers got, you know like, they get up on stage and they could sing a song, and I get up there and I start to shake, even right now my hands are starting to shake.*

*And I find that the more I do it, I get more comfortable with it, you know, but... there's a fear there, which I don't know where it is but, that's what Dad's open for, you know, he's open to that. I get over that and I'll actually get out there, and actually do something but, when I get there, I gotta find a find a starting point of where to go.*

*But yeah, it's made us made us all angry and... violent you know what I mean? Like... we, all me and all my brothers been through jail, you know what I mean, like, there was some point, some part there.*

## **JAX COMPTON**

*It's ongoing, yeah, there's still lots of healing to go. You know, you're so young. And so, I think that's really important for everyone to know that this is an ongoing thing and what you're feeling and everything is very normal and important.*

*Wonderful to have you here with your dad, and another wonderful person we have in this room too, speaking with us today, yarning with us, is Auntie Leslie Franks.*

## **AUNTIE LESLIE FRANKS**

*Hello. I'm Leslie Franks. I'm a Djabugay and Wonnarua woman, Wonnarua on my dad's side and Djabugay on mum's, up in far North Queensland and the Hunter Valley. My father was in Kinchela Boys Home, taken as a baby, kidnapped from Hugo Street Redfern, never to see his family again till he was about 17, 18. I grew up in a family with Dad and Mum, they had five kids, I'm the 2nd eldest. I now have the privilege of supporting the Stolen Generation at Kinchela Boys Home Corporation, which I am so proud to do. I've never ever, in a million years thought I would ever, have a chance to help heal our mob. Because I realised that, no one ever told me, or us, that we were suffering. We were suffering because of something that was done to us. We all kind of grew up thinking it was just us and our family. We were all out of control, and didn't realise that there's plenty of other people out there and we have a right to feel, and not a right to be out of control I guess, but it made sense when I understood why we were like we were.*

*And my journey through healing has been ongoing since I turned 40. I realise then that I needed to start to change things in my life for my children's sake, for my own sake, and that's when I made the decision to do things differently and to think differently, because my mind was always trying to make me do things. My mind, I finally realised, it has a mind of its own and it wants to do what it wants. And I didn't like that because a lot of the times I was doing things that I didn't want to do. But it was because, I realise now, because of the trauma that I have been feeling. And that's not to blame my mother and father. Not at all. It's just, something that happens to you when bad experiences happen to your family that... It's hard to process in your mind. We've never really had a platform to talk about these things, and I think that's what's going to help us heal, is opening up that can of worms, if that's what you'd like to call it, and start to talk about it, and let's help our mob heal.*

## **JAX COMPTON**

*I wanna introduce our 4th guest here, Blake. Thank you for joining us Blake. With your wonderful voice, I wanted to ask you about the words intergenerational trauma and what they mean to you and if you've spoken about it with your family, your Elders, or if it's something that you and your generation talk about.*

## **BLAKE TATAFU**

*I am a Wiradjuri Dunghutti man. My family come from Trangie and Kempsey. So even though my last name is Tatafu, my mum was a Smith, her father was a Smith. My Nan was a Watson and a Freeman. Trauma has been something that I never knew by the word, I always knew by the behaviour or by the actions of my family. Little things that when I was younger that I thought were simple, that I thought that... Why is this so difficult for my family to understand? They were big lessons for me. They taught me a lot about where I came from and why bits and pieces of every member of my family were broken in certain ways. And it told me, it taught me the breadth of what trauma looks like. There's no definition or measurement of how big or small it is. If it hurts, it hurts. And I think, growing up in that environment and seeing that not just within my family, but my community out in Western Sydney. We all understand it, we all see it, and it's only really in like the last probably five years where we're calling it out and speaking the truth. Because it's from our truth that we... understand, and it's from our understanding that we start to heal.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Absolutely. Uncle Michael, when you hear young people talk about – especially young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – when you hear them say, we understand about trauma, does that make you feel proud that they understand and want to be respectful, but also help our community heal?*

## UNCLE WIDDY

*It does make me feel proud, but above the proud, it makes me feel a lot of hope. And that hope is that the time will come when they'll be able to handle it and not to be passing it on to our grandchildren and our great grandchildren because, again, I never knew... I was told that I was traumatised, and I didn't know.*

*It was just a word. And then, just kept on falling down into the same spot. And I think about this, you know, what is this? And I talk about my children and we didn't realise that there's so many loving people out there, that love, you know. But we all thought, we couldn't understand why? Why did they let all this happen to us? So the blame, we was blaming, and it came to the point that it just had to stop. So how do you stop something? You gotta learn about it. If you're gonna, you know, fix something, you best know what's broken before you can fix it.*

*So I started that journey and I'm happy now where I am. I know that it's a lot better than where I was. When I hear the nephews talking about this and his parents giving him some insight about the trauma and that, that's beautiful because I didn't get to that point with my children. I give them an insight in how to drink and how to be... I make them do push-ups and all of those things, I took that place home with me. Make them run around the block but to hear him talking, all of them, here today, that's beautiful. That's hope at the top of the ladder and that's the only way to stop it, is to know about it. And they know about it. And so we need to let every other person know that when some of these things that people do don't look right, don't be angry, at 'em. Try to understand where it comes from, because it comes from over 200 odd years of distrust across this Land, and that is the most magical thing about anything. Trust, you must trust. If you can't trust, you're in a bad place.*

## JAX COMPTON

*So Robbie, when your dad talks about hope and the next generation what your family has gone through, how has it affected you and your relationships with your friends and, your tight knit community? I mean, you wouldn't be the only person that has been affected by trauma such as this.*

## BOBBY DIXON

*My friends are my family, man. But you know, like I always keep all my little nephews and nieces always close, you know. And I try to teach them. I mean, like Dad has shown me, and we try to get out there as much as we can but, I can see it, like how it affects him. You know, like my nephew said to me once, he said he didn't know what colour he was. He didn't know because he thought he was white, but he... he's Blak, he's Aboriginal, so he didn't know which one he was, you know? And I said, well look, your mother there. So, what colour is she? And he said, yeah, but look at my colour. So you know like, didn't know what to really do with him, but I just kind of took him with me and, took him fishing and, did a few things and that, and he got really close to me. A lot of them have you know? Like I poured a lot of them in, but, I can see the anger from them still. Like they snap at their mothers and scream and they... and I have to go in, you know, like to settle them down. But... it's passed on through our DNA. So it's somehow, in some way, I do the same things as my father did. Like I told him one part...*

*I was at home and he was gone, and I was all by myself, and I just started crying for no reason, you know? And I was trying to tell myself, what? Why? Why am I upset? Why am I crying? You know like, and I'm getting angry with myself. So I grabbed the pillow and I started screaming into it, and I was screaming and screaming and then all sudden it just went.*

*It was like, I sat up and I started laughing, I was like, oh, I just started laughing to myself. And I was there and I was like, why am I crying? And I said no one can really hurt me. And nothing can really hurt me. And I said, why am I letting you bring me down, pull me down, you know? And Dad told me, after I told him what happened, he told me he said he'd done exactly the same thing. And so, exactly the same thing. You know, how do you explain that? Yeah, but it's just trying to pull ourselves up, you know, and it's just us. And if we help one another, we all start sticking together and pull each other up, eventually we'll get there. You know, we're gonna get there. You know, it just starts.*

## JAX COMPTON

*Naw, that's... You're doing a wonderful job with your little nephews and nieces, and I'm sure the way that, they look after you, I think is so wonderful because, you know, you're going through your own trauma. And yet you're still giving to the next generation. I think everybody's doing that. And I guess back in Western Sydney, there's mob that have similar stories to Bobby's nephews, about their identity, and where they don't feel like they're fitting in. And they also, are experiencing some sort of trauma in this situation. What I understand is that... they, don't feel like they know where they belong because of things such as this, do you agree with that sort of... statement? Is that mob out West especially, have a lot of problems with connecting to identity and culture.*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*I think there's a lot of different ways you can look at that. I think one of the key themes that... young people now, the ones that are in schools. Is that all the Aboriginal families in Mount Druitt all migrated there from all different areas. So you have a lot of people who don't get the opportunity to return to home, who don't have that connection to Country or to their families and their identity is always in question because of the people around them.*

*You know, Mount Druitt, Penrith we're all stuck with the stigma of being like a bad place already. And so our young people there, our young Blak kids there, just don't wanna thrive and they wanna thrive without that stigma, without that labelling. And it's really from within the roots of our community where we get our strength.*

*I mean, I wasn't just raised by my family. I was raised by my community. Like, you know, if I ever mucked up in public and my family went in there shocked my mum wasn't there, I'd bet your bottom dollar that someone would be calling her going hey, asshole Blake mucking up over there at the shops. Deal with him man. And it's from that, it's from that nurturing and it's from that love that I'm very blessed, and very proud to come from a community out West like that. Because they've shaped me from the strength of a lot of women, a lot of strong Blak women. And our men have shaped me into who I am today.*

## JAX COMPTON

*I wanted to ask you, Auntie Leslie, about what you can see as the impacts of trauma on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a community?*

## AUNTIE LESLIE FRANKS

*Many things, but one thing that comes straight to mind that I'm seeing, there's a lot of mental health issues with our young people. And I'm wondering what that is because I remember growing up, you didn't see many people with mental health issues. But I'm seeing it more and more. So that's one. And then I see, you know, the high suicide rate. I'm seeing, you know, especially the young fullas. But then the women are catching up, all going to jail. I'm seeing our families just broken, and no one wants to discipline or to parent anymore, possibly because they don't know how, and give up. I'm seeing... yeah, just chaos.*

*And, I really want us, our mob, to know that, like what we're talking about, give them hope that, you know, we can get through this. Come on. We've gotta go back. We've gotta go back to the start. We are a deadly mob of people. If we just all, act like this, and carry on like this, then what they wanted to do to our Uncles and Aunties back in the day, they would have succeeded. And we don't want that. We want them to know they haven't seen the best of us yet. They're not gonna break us. And that's what we need to teach our kids to stand proud in their identity and be proud of their culture and that goes a long way to healing I feel.*

*Your mental health, when you have a vision that you wanna strive for. That sort of drives you to stop all the negatives in your life, most of the time, or the negatives won't control your life. So, if you have a vision of what you want to do and how you can do it and we all can do it because we're all experts at being Blak. And we know the issues that we face, and we know what we're going through and if we don't know, go talk to the Elders, come talk to the Stolen Generation organisations. Just start talking, and start the conversation, because then you might start to, learn things that you never knew before that can help you make a difference. Because we can do it. I believe in our mob, and I know that we can. About who we are because, I think, it got blurred, the lines got blurred but maybe blurred is not the right word about... who we are as a people. I think they tried to convince us that we weren't as good as the rest, but I don't know who they were talking to, because we all know how deadly we are, don't we? Yeah, we just got to be reminded sometimes.*



## JAX COMPTON

*That's exactly right and I think this podcast or even storytelling processes like this, are so important. Because this is a safe space and like Blake said, we are very, this generation, is very aware that we are very privileged, but we need to tell this story. And we need others to hear it, more importantly it needs to be shared so there's an understanding, so everyone can grow together. And move forward. I guess Blake, what I would say to you is, what do you think something like this is going to do, like a storytelling process like this podcast, is going to do to help our young people heal and understand and move forward?*

## BLAKE TATAFU

*I think there's just so much power in truth telling and being raw with ourselves and speaking without judgments and speaking freely about who we are and where we've come from. And I really hope that opens up, a lot of doors and conversations for young mob and their families to have those conversations with each other and let them know, that, you know, they don't need to hide anything to look like a strong parent or a strong person in the community. They can be exactly who they are because we know where we've come from. And we know how strong we are. We know how resilient we are. It's just that truth of understanding gives us that innate power and that control of our own history and our future, for it to be a far better one than it has been in the past. So, knowing where we've come from gives us the power, to be the authors of our future. No one's gonna write it for us.*

## JAX COMPTON

*I want to really thank you – Uncle Michael, Bobby, Auntie Leslie, Blake – for coming in, for talking, opening up your hearts, sharing your story. I'm very honoured to be sitting in this room with all four of you. And I wish you all the best on your healing journeys, including myself in that, but yes, I'll send so much love and respect to you and your families. But yes, thank you so much.*

*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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