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Reconciliation round table transcript

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David Rathman

Today, we're celebrating and talking about reconciliation week. My name's David Rathman and I'm here to host this conversation with young people, elders, and some talented Aboriginal individuals. So, this morning we're going to talk about reconciliation week and what it means. So I'll ask Uncle Frank to welcome us to Kurna Country.

Frank Wanganeen

Kurna language 32 seconds.

So, what I just said is that, first of all I just want to acknowledge the ancestors and also recognise where we this event is on Kurna Country. And on behalf of the Kurna people I welcome here to Tandanya the place of red kangaroo so, Ngathaitya thank you.

David Rathman

So, this morning, I just want to welcome Frank Wanganeen, Tamaru, Sasha Hill as well Khyleesha, who are going to be the main stars of this conversation this morning. So, what I'd like to do now is to start to ask you to introduce yourself and talk a little bit about who you are? What you aspire to do and why you're in the world with us today?

Tamaru

Ladies first.

Sasha Hill

Thought you were getting the eye there. So hello, thank you for having me here today. My name's Sasha Hill. I'm a Yamatji/Noongar woman from Western Australia, but have been lucky enough to live and work and raised babies on Kurna Country for quite some time. I am a social worker by trade. I am also an artist. And that's probably all you need to know about me at

this point in time.

Tamaru

Naa Marni. My name is Tamara. I'm a proud Narungga/Kurna man. My job predominantly is to teach Kurna culture in schools from ELC to universities. Really encouraging Reconciliation Action Plans all over the state. I do them in the public sector, the private sector, and we're trying to get them across schools across the state, and loving it.

Khyleesha

Hello. So my name is Khyleesha Welgraven I'm a proud Adnyamathanha, Kokatha and Arrente woman. So, currently I am in year 12 at Kildare College where I'm also one of the college captains. I'm also completing a Commonwealth bank traineeship that finishes this year. I'm really enthusiastic about social change and social justice. So, empowering others to make a change in the world.

David Rathman

Thank you. That's a nice way to finish the introductions, with the future. We a beautiful setting here today, and it probably reminds you a little bit of what Kurna Country was like before European settlement. National Reconciliation Week 2022 is the theme Be Brave, Make Change. And it's a challenge to all Australians to tackle the unfinished business of reconciliation. Reconciliation is not about us, the Aboriginal people sitting at this table. It's about you watching. The National Reconciliation Week theme Be Brave, Make Change is a challenge to individuals, to your families, your communities, organisations, and government. To be brave and tackle the unfinished business of reconciliation so, all of us can make change for the benefits of all Australians. You probably know that National Reconciliation Week is the 27th of May to the 3rd of June. You probably don't know that

It started on a Sunday as a prayer event and then built into National Reconciliation Week.

It's a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements. And to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia. This year's theme builds on the 2021 theme, which encouraged us all to greater action on reconciliation. And we saw unprecedented responses to our suggested actions for every day, and for braver action. Action rather than talk. Although we're going to be talking a bit today. What I'd like to do is to ask the panel, and doesn't really require anyone to start but it helps if we get someone starting. Otherwise, I'll nominate you. How does that sound? What I'd like to do is ask that each of you think through this and then comment in your own words as to what reconciliation means for you. Silence is golden.

Tamaru

All right, I'll kick it off get it over and go with. So one of my main walks in life is repatriation. And I'm on the Kurna... It's not the board, it's the subcommittee about repatriating our elders past back to Kurna Country. I've done about three of them now where we return our ancestors back to our land. And I've told my child that it's good for our wellbeing. It's good for everybody's wellbeing to repatriate. And we acknowledge the atrocities of the past but how do we move forward together? Unfortunately, I've put skulls, I've put legs, I've put teeth, I've put remains on our country, but not the full skeletal remains. I believe why should I have a skull here in my country and yet the body is back in England in a museum? So, my goal is for my daughter and my family to get the full skeletal remains if we find that's passed away in the war they actually bring the whole body back. Well, why can't we bring the whole body back as well?

And so through these processes we educate. The last

one we did up at the Playford Council area were we buried 120 people back on our country. The premier came and helped us out and put some remains back on our land. And we had over 2500 people there that came past and hugged us on the way through. And these non-Aboriginal people said to us, "Well, we really appreciate you having us and thanks for letting us come." Well we said, "Actually, it's really good for your wellbeing as well as ours." We all acknowledged these atrocities and we need to move forward and the only way we can move forward is through the spirit of reconciliation.

And this is why in the education space I love doing RAPs. So, Reconciliation Action Plans on how schools can engage Aboriginal people coming to their site. How we can acknowledge the language on the site, and how we can actually work together. A lot of teachers, a lot of schools are very frustrated, they don't want to offend us. I sarcastically say that you've stolen our land, you've stole our kids you can't offend me anymore, but we need to move forward together. And when we make little tiny jokes like this it sort of makes it people a bit more relaxing. And I encourage teachers to make a mistake, because we all learn from mistakes. It doesn't matter whether it's a mistake writing my language incorrect or mistakes on how you talk to our people. We really do want to walk side by side with you.

When I do my welcomes to country and I acknowledge I'm on Kurna land and thank you uncle Frank for welcoming, that what I do I stand in front of somebody and I say, "Look, I don't want to walk in front of you," and when I stand behind people and say, "I don't want to walk behind you." I stand next to them and say, "I want to walk side by side with you, because this is the only way we can move forward together." And through these Reconciliation Action Plans is how we do it. So, I've done them with government, I've done them with private industry, whether it be hospitals and with the

building companies that work on Kurna Country. And I really enjoy doing them at schools. I do them at private schools and I do them at public schools. It's just about how we engage each other and how we can move forward together.

So, I'm really proud to see a young Aboriginal lady here at the table, because I'm mindful my grandfather told me and my grandmother told me that whatever we do, we do for you. We don't do it for us. You're our hope. You're our foundation. And we want to guide you. We want to help you. We have yarning circles where we have old people, young people sitting around talking with hindsight on how to share knowledge with you guys. And I'm so proud. I just had this really buzz in my heart when I heard that you are the head of school in your school so how cool is that an Aboriginal person the head of the school. You are our shining light so, by all means ask questions, we'll share with you. You just make us really proud by what you're doing.

I'm sitting next to a lady that is an absolutely awesome artist. She's a bit shy and saying, "Oh, I'm just an artist." Well, if anybody's seen her work, her work is pretty good. And I was lucky enough one day to do a welcome the country for one of her art exhibitions and I got to see her work and meet her family again, and realise her dad is actually an awesome bloke I already knew him, but it's really good to meet young people that are really great at what they do and you need to immerse in their culture, in their understanding of our art and our language. So, that's me. If you're out there, please just talk to us.

Get a RAP program happening. You can do little things deliverables from the straight away, whether it be acknowledging your schools on Kurna Country. Writing your email headers. My community is the only Aboriginal community out there in the world that has native title of a capital city. So why aren't you acknowledging it? Why aren't you being the leader? Take out the word traditional owners and put in native title holders. That's a deliverable you can do straight away. And Australia post allow you to change, from number one Smith Street Kurna Country, North Adelaide. We can do these sort of activities straight away. And just talk to us. We happily work with you. That's me.

David Rathman

Well said.

Frank Wanganeen

Yeah. Oh, I'm my name's Frank Wanganeen. I'm a Kurna/ Narungga person and I'm a cultural educator and I really enjoy doing... You educating the wider community around the Kurna culture and language. And particularly young kids so I go into schools, kindys. And even I've had little kindy kids coming up and the tour and they're singing the Niina Marni song and so at a young age they learning language and about Kurna culture. So I think education is a way to go to try and educate people about culture in their own backyard. And people are starting sort of wanting to learn and have a better understanding about culture and it's about getting... Or overcoming your fear, because a lot of people are still frightened to talk to an Aboriginal person because there's a lot of stigma around the things back in their own minds that they have to sort of conquer so, I think education's a way to go and more people get educated and have a better understanding about the Kurna people and Aboriginal people in general, so.

Sasha Hill

Thank you very much. I also feel the same as you both. I think it's reconciliation for me is around truth telling. I think you need to have that as the foundation. We need to know the true history of this country. I think I also have a bit of a love hate relationship with reconciliation I think, because again, as you were saying, uncle, it's more often than not Aboriginal people who are the storytellers and the ones in reconciliation week talking about our experiences and giving the kind of one-on-ones of how to work with our mob and how to do culturally appropriate or culturally responsive kind of business.

But again I understand that that's kind of what we need to do. It also plays into our natural ways of being and doing and living, we are natural storytellers. We are natural sharers. We're also natural growers, I think that's really important too to kind of talk about that too. You both touched on not wanting people feeling like they don't want to do the wrong thing. And I think it's really important to kind of recognise that, but this is about reconciliation you just have to kind of be

brave and you might do the wrong thing, you might get growled but that's okay. That's our way of learning too. So I think that's really important. I guess the other thing that I want to talk about reconciliation so like I mentioned, I'm a social worker and an artist, so I always like to bring kind of those themes of allyship into kind of people's journeys.

I think it's really important to think of yourself as an ally if you're kind of coming along this journey of reconciliation. Anyone can be an ally. And an ally is about using your privilege and your power to support other people that don't have that voice in whatever way you can do that. So, I think that's really important, probably that's the biggest takeaway for me that I want people to know about reconciliation. If you don't think of yourself as an ally, why is that? So, think about allyship. Think about your allyship journey. Think about your cultural learning journey. And again, listen to stories of our mob and our people and the multiple generations. Do that truth telling. But think about how you can then action that, as an ally.

Khyleesha

Coming from a young person's perspective I think reconciliation is about celebrating our differences, especially coming from a school that's very multicultural. I think it should start reconciliation within schooling, because that's where you learn the most. I think it's about attempting to strengthen the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, because that's when you can kind of make a difference. I think it's about accepting and comprehending the past while also establishing connection with others to build that trust with each other and also that respect as well.

David Rathman

Lovely.

Kyleesha

Oh, thank you.

David Rathman

That was good. 50 years ago in January 1972, a group of brave young men began the longest protest for indigenous land rights sovereignty and self-

determination. They planted a beach umbrella, and signage proclaiming the Aboriginal embassy. That's being brave. That's attempting to make change. And that's what it's all about. You have to move in a different direction, to just talking about it, raising flags or having conversations, it's what are you going to do as a student group? How are you going to influence your space? What are you going to do to influence the way teachers conduct themselves? And how are you going to be more inclusive? So stories of being brave. Have you got a story of you being brave? Tamaru you talked about your desire to get your ancestral remains home to country in a respectful way and what have you done in your journey that made you feel as though you were doing something substantial, something brave, you were making a change?

Tamaru

That's a pretty powerful question. I get emotional sometimes with some of the things that I do. I'm mindful, my father was whipped at school not to speak his language. My father wasn't allowed to drink out of the same tap as non-Aboriginal people. I talk about my life and my life only. My father was a 22 year old Aboriginal man that made love to a 17 year old non-Aboriginal lady and produced me. And my white grandfather said to my dad, "You either go to war or you go to jail." So my father joined the army, he went to Vietnam and he fought for his country that he couldn't even vote in. And so now I proudly teach my language at schools. And I listen to little beautiful non-Aboriginal kids speak my language with confidence, with pride. And it humbles me, because I feel that I'm doing the wrong thing by asking to get paid for this thing.

When I'm sharing my culture and to hear Aboriginal kids speak my language, to hear non-Aboriginal kids speak my language. I feel guilt asking for money to be paid but I need to be mindful, I have to pay my mortgage. But the most powerful thing I've done lately is I'm teaching the Labour Party, my language. And this month the Labour Party are going to use that language in parliament house. Now, how moving is that? And how humbling is it that for a society that hated Aboriginal people before and now they're going to speak my language in parliament. And to me, I think that's brave and I think it's a challenge that I really

wish my father was there because when it happens, I'm just going to be... I don't know. Probably the same feeling I had when while sitting in a room and the judge said we had native title.

That was a big day too. Took us a long time to get it so, sharing language and listening to kids speak my language is humbling and we teach about respect and saying, Ngathaitya - thank you. This year I had a Christmas card from a single mom of three kids. And she had two older daughters and a young boy that I teach at kindy and this boy was punching his sisters and being really disrespectful to his sisters but because this fellow learned Ngathaitya and respect, he now takes the food from the stove and gives it to his sister at the table and the mum was just so grateful for learning that side of my culture. And so, these things make you put up with all the people that knock you, all the people that stab you in the back.

All the people that think that, "Ah, you drive Merc, you make too much money you're a white fell now," or some of us and most of us live in two worlds. I have my Aboriginal family say to me, "Are you white today or black today?" I have my white family say to me, "Are you black today or white today?" Well, I live in two worlds. And I'm proud of who I am. And I think one of my cheekiest comments I make to all kids at school... Students, sorry young lady is they say to me, "Oh uncle, why do you think your Aboriginal mate you're not very black." And "Oh yeah, that's a great question. Here look, here's my cup of coffee. And if I pour lots of milk in this cup of coffee is it a glass of milk or a cup of coffee?" And they go, "Oh, coffee." I said, "Well, that's right. My dad's the coffee, my mum's the milk you put them together. I'm still coffee. And proud of it."

So, to answer your question, I think teaching our language in this modern world is the way to go about it because what I love about students and especially awesome young ones like this one is if a non-Aboriginal fellow learns our language, learns our culture, understands our people. These kids today they can be lawyers, premieres, judges, anything they want. Now they've got the opportunity to do that. When something about an Aboriginal person crosses their table, they're not going to stick it in the two hard basket. They're going to deal with it. They're going to work it out. They're going to go, "Oh, I know Uncle Tamaru from school. He was a good bloke. This bloke

might be a good bloke too. Let's work with him." So this is what I love about my culture. What I love about trying to be brave, trying to stay at school and keep teaching it.

Answering all the naysayers. Like I said, one of the largest private schools in this state with my auntie who I look at as my mum, Auntie Lynette Crocker and a teacher said to me in front of her, "Well, why do you think you're an elder?" And my auntie just ripped her a new one and just educated her on about how we have emerging elders and how we have elders that have been around for a while that educate and share knowledge with us and put her in her place. When actually now she's a really good friend of mine and I love working with her. She's a director of a kindy and we work closely, because I believe as friends as educators and teachers we should be able to have an argument. I argue with my wife every day doesn't mean I love her any less, but we end up walking out on the same page. So being brave is sharing my culture, when it wasn't wanted at once. And I'm really looking forward to hearing Kaurua language spoken in parliament house.

David Rathman

Thanks for that.

David Rathman

Certainly example of being brave and prepared to make change. Many examples in that. So, Sasha, putting the brush to the canvas, I always remember an old Aboriginal friend of mine who people kept asking what he was painting. He said, "Look, if I stand here and tell you what I'm going to paint, I'll never paint anything." So you've painted a lot of stories on canvas. What's your example of being brave and making change?

Sasha Hill

I think my story of bravery as well does incorporate my art. It also incorporates my education. And the two world's education, I think. I think that's really important. So I was the first person in my family on my mom's non-Aboriginal side and my dad's Aboriginal side to finish high school. And first to go on to university in my family. And so I think that's

really important that I had that education, but also acknowledging that that's not the only way to have an education. My painting and my connecting to family, connecting to country. That is also just as much of an education for me. But I think that bravery is being able to walk in two worlds and be able to support the non-Aboriginal world to understand painting and art and history and do that truth telling through that kind of way.

Again, like I said, I'm a social worker so, I make sure that I involve a healing approach. So I think that's where kind of the bravery kind of comes in through my art and my work. If I didn't go to university, if I didn't study social work, I wouldn't be in the privileged position that I am now to be able to support our Aboriginal families, to heal from past traumas that we've kind of been through. I work with a lot of stolen generation mums. I work with a lot of mums that haven't had their Aboriginal parenting practices valued. So I think it's really important to kind of talk about the ways that I do that through art and through healing. And bringing our Aboriginal parenting practices and our strengths of culture, our strengths of parenting in.

And I guess, like I said, the bravery kind of comes in by working in a kind of a white mainstream system and constantly kind of having to push back on that system to educate people, I guess, about our parenting and about our ways, about the truth telling. And about how important it is to continue our healing journey. And we all be on that healing journey, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people. So, I think that bravery comes in little acts every single day. I think there can be some really big brave acts, but it's also in that constantly fighting the system and ensuring that our voices are heard, our voices are valued. And we continually stand up.

David Rathman

I might leave you to a last Frank because you're one of the bosses. Khyleesha what about yourself? Being brave making change, you've obviously done that by being a leader in your school. It's amazing achievement.

Khyleesha

I think being brave to me is about telling your story. So for instance, last year I gave a speech to the school about racism, in specifically about my story with racism. And I think by me sharing my story, even though it was confronting, I think it did open the eyes for both students and teachers about what goes on in not just Aboriginal lives but what certain other people's lives as well, that what you say and what you do can actually affect others. And I think by telling my story and being brave to able to share that I think it kind of open ups the topic about what else can be done within the school system to kind of rule out racism. And also to what else can be done to kind of prevent it from happening within a school setting and also within in a social and community setting as well.

David Rathman

And how did you get a reaction to that? Was it a positive one?

Khyleesha

It was emotional, I did cry in the day. But I had a lot of teachers and students coming up to me afterwards to say that they were very empowered by my story and that it was something that they were definitely going to look into and that's kind of what I wanted to achieve so, having them be able to come up to me and kind of having that conversation was the main reason that I did the speech and I'm grateful that I was able to get that message across.

David Rathman

How did you feel about becoming a leader?

Khyleesha

A bit nervous, to be honest, I'm not going to lie because it is something that I love doing. I love working with people and I love getting out in the community. So being able to kind of start that and be one of the leaders for that is very special to me, because I love speaking for others who may not have a voice yet. So being able to get their message across and being able to start that conversation for them is something that's very special to me.

David Rathman

Beautiful.

Khyleesha

Thank you.

David Rathman

Now, Frank, you're a pretty brave character. Brave and making change, what are the things that you believe you've done, those things in your life?

Frank Wanganeen

Yeah, I think the challenge for me is trying to educate people and I get people on my tours where they... Particularly older people and they actually cry because they say to me, "We weren't taught anything about Aboriginal people," and just hearing those sort of things and think, "Well, there's a lot that needs to be done, and educations, like I say, is a key and seeing people like the teacher, it's taken on those sort of leadership even you David with your work that you do is inspiring. And I think to be brave you got to be courageous and go out and sort of challenge other people, but educate them I think is really important. I think education's a key to be able to change perceptions that people have about Aboriginal people.

David Rathman

Beautiful. I think it comes back to Tamara's point about bringing people along with you, and getting that story across. So when students are thinking about this and they're talking with their teachers and their families it's about bringing them along. So it's important to get your messaging right, to get some help with that from your student colleagues and from some of the people that are sitting here with me today. 30 years ago in June 1992, the 10 year fight of a group of Torres Strait Islanders led to Eddie Mabo, over ownership of Mer on the Murray Islands. And it resulted in a high court decision that recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have rights to land. Our point that was made about the Kurna people being the native title holders, not just occupiers of that country so, it's important to recognise

that those events occurred and it's important for students to understand that history, as the points that people have made here today. Now when we look at change...

Tamaru

Can I just say something quickly? Even though in our minds we got to native title, the supreme court judge didn't actually verbalise the words native title.

David Rathman

No, that's true.

Tamaru

She verbalised that it was consent of determination. So, in some people's minds they're still oppressing us by not saying native title, but they are on the other hand acknowledging we were here first and that's all we wanted, but it's funny language is interesting, both our language and their language. It is.

David Rathman

Particularly legal language.

Tamaru

Indeed, indeed and that's a complete different language.

David Rathman

Legal language is even more complicated. One of the things that is hard to comprehend is how politicians muck with all of this over the years. And there are some prime ministers who changed the whole course of this. We've had more promises of treaty than-

Tamaru

Anybody.

David Rathman

... than anybody and we've never got a real start. So when young Australians are thinking about their contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people going forward, what they should think about is when you promise something, deliver. Don't talk

about it, do something about it. This theme is actually being brave enough to bring about change. And we've all sat here and said that examples of traumatic events in people's lives never really been healed properly over time. And that's an important aspect of where we're going. My old auntie used to say to me, never ever go on the journey I went on, because we went on that journey. It's your job to take the story to a different place. And that's really what we're appealing to students about. Don't go on the same journey that your past ancestors and governments and politicians and school teachers went on. What you've got to do is bring about change. And find a new direction.

There's an old Aboriginal saying that says, when a non-Aboriginal person asks the Aboriginal elder, "Where's the path?" And the elder said, "There's no path. You have to make a new path." And that's really what you were talking about. Getting people to make that new path. And the work you're doing in schools. You are painting. Frank's tours, they're all about creating that new path. And Charles Perkins once said, "Can't live in the past, but the past lives with us." So they're all pretty imposing signposts for being brave and also bringing about change. Okay. We've talked about being brave, bringing about change. Talked about a bit of your own stories. What do we need to change?

Tamaru

Well, changing in my sphere of the educational path is that, well we teach these children language and we share language with them but when the children take it home to their parents, to the parents, it's blah, blah, blah. And the parents are embarrassed they never learn it at school so what we're finding now is what language we teach, we need leaflets or pamphlets to go home with the children so they can share with the parents what they are. Because like uncle Frank was saying that the kindy kids and the primary kids that I work with are now going home and teaching their siblings language and teaching their parents' language. And so this is where, this is why yarning circles or older people have a hindsight. We need this to go home for the parents as well because it's important for the parents to learn.

But the other thing that I've noticed lately in my role is the co-chair of the Blackwood Reconciliation Group is, it's not the school's right to teach Aboriginal kids about stolen generation. It's actually the parents' right to teach these kids. Because sometimes the school's teach about stolen gen and the child might be second or third generation stolen child, goes home and talks about it with mom and dad. Well mom and dad aren't dealing with it either. Well mom and dad are... It's very confronting to them. So, our people need to teach our kids about stolen generation, before a school inadvertently takes them to Colebrook or stolen generation site and teach about this, it's not their right. They're just crossing the line a little bit and this is where through reconciliation action plans at schools, once they get cultural awareness training, they know they shouldn't be doing this stuff.

And this is why I love RAPs because the Premier said a year ago that every government agency had to have a Reconciliation Action Plan. So the flow on effect is the education department every school has to have one. So, it's really great for the schools to embrace it and to learn about our culture. And to teach it correctly. I love listening to this one saying about truth telling, that's right Tiati we tell the truth. So long have students learnt Anglo-Aboriginal culture, they've learned didgeridoo. Well, we say didgeri- don't. It's a (Kurna Language) let's teach them the truth.

And schools are finally embracing it. And it's really great time to be Aboriginal and be in schools and teach our culture at the moment because they're immersing themselves with it, and students are loving it. I don't see many kids these days that want to learn Indonesian or Chinese or Mandarin, they all want to learn Kurna, on Kurna Country. And to hear them speak it. When I walk into schools and hear kids keep coming up to me, Niina Marni, Niina Marni. This is great. It's just humbling, but we've got to get them to answer it because too many kids are asking us, "Are we good?" But no one's answering each other. But it's baby steps. You got to crawl before you can run.

David Rathman

Khyleesha, you are in a school, so what changes do you think young people need to make into the future?

Khyleesha

Well, I think that it's great that you see a lot in the community and schools that they promote reconciliation week, but I think it also begins with actual actions being put into place. So it's great to see posters around and things like that but I think for something to actually change, you actually need to put an action in place. It doesn't have to be this big story, it can be a small push because that can actually create a domino effect. But I think we just need to come as a group or a community to kind of put something in place rather than just saying, "Yeah, I think something needs to be done."

David Rathman

Beautiful. Frank, what do you think needs to change?

Frank Wanganeen

Well, just basically people's attitude toward about Aboriginal people and they're still at that sort of mindset, oh you know their dirty and all these sort of negative sort of stereotypes I think, sort of break that cycle of negativity around what people think about Aboriginal people and their culture.

David Rathman

What would you attempt to do to get that done? You do your tours, you do a lot of talking to people.

Frank Wanganeen

Yeah. Well education and just basically making them aware of the positive stuff that's sort of happening in our community and... Because there's a lot of good people doing a lot of good things that should be highlighted and more focused.

David Rathman

So in terms of your experience, Sasha, you've worked as social worker, you've worked doing your art, what from your experiences do you think needs to be changed?

Sasha Hill

I think lots needs to be changed. And I think it's really hard to hear that a lot needs to be changed, but I think

it's really important a part of that truth telling, like you said it starts from that bias and that stereotypes and that's really easy things to change through education and through talking and through a commitment to wanting to change and wanting to know better. Also, with talking about some quotes, I really love the quote sorry means that you don't do it again. And I think that is quite universal. I think it can be transferred to this as well. So once you know more, how do you not do more harm? I also think that young people and children and kids are the most influential group of people that you could ever talk to.

I think with our children are our future, absolutely. And they will make change for the next generations to come. Because I think they don't come, we live in a world now that we are able to address bias and stereotypes and learn new ways and kids are taking that on so I think that's really, really important. I guess for me though the biggest part is not keeping it just in reconciliation week. I think it's really important it's great that we've got so many initiative... Yeah, we've got so much great people out there like you said, in community and in schools and doing art and doing so much community events and networking and working amazing jobs, we have so much strength in our culture. So how do we make sure that moves past reconciliation week one week into every day? I want to encourage the Aboriginal kids that are at school and Torres Strait Islanders kids that are at school, keep going.

It's really hard you might be facing racism. You might have stereotypes, you might have bias, you might have so much working against you, but this is your community and this is what the legacy that you'll be able to bring to it. And encourage non-Aboriginal kids as well to be able to you are a part of this, like we were all saying change comes when we walk together. It won't come walking ahead or walking behind, it will only come when we're working together so, how do you be an ally? That's a really good question I think to ask yourselves.

And we, as a panel, we don't have the answers for that, because that's really important that you look at yourself and look at your allyship, look at your bias, look at your stereotypes, look at how you were raised. Look at the narratives that your school's giving you around Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture. And

if it's not good, then how do you change it? We need people to be brave and make that change within themselves. We need schools to be brave and make that change within themselves. We have a wealth of knowledge and so many people that can support you on that journey. But ultimately it's an individual and a school and a community opportunity to step up really

Tamaru

Indeed.

David Rathman

25 years ago in April 1997, the report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was released. It's a testament to the bravery of thousands who taught the impact of forcible removal from their families, cultures, and communities. And that's what we're talking about when we talk being brave, those people were extremely brave. Some of you've talked about some of the negativity that goes around. So, when we've got young people like Khyleesha and other Aboriginal students in schools with the young people that support them or kids who are different from mainstream communities, how do they handle... Or what advice would you give them as well as handling it, what advice would you give them about managing negative responses, to Aboriginal issues in their schools, or their supportive Aboriginal people?

Sasha Hill

I think it was hard for me I went to a private school. And I loved the school, I got a really good foundation at that school, absolutely. But there was definitely some racism there and some stereotypes. I remember for me being in year 10, and having an English teacher who was amazing, he ended up being really amazing, but would always come up to me, "Do you need some extra help? Do you need some extra help? What's going on for you?" And I just wasn't really sure, I was thinking, "Why aren't any of the other kids in the class..." "I was the only Aboriginal kid in the class. "Why aren't any other kids kind of getting this as well?" And then she had some side conversations with me on the side and it turned out that they had been labelling kids with special needs and who needed some other support and kids with disabilities as the same as the

Aboriginal kids.

So, that was just some of the small microaggressions, I guess, that are in the system. So again, my Aboriginality is not a disability. My Aboriginality is not something that I needed extra support around. And then we had a conversation and when I kind of realised that this was again... It was again the emotional labour the Aboriginal people and the expectation of me as a year 10 student, to support this white teacher around what that looked like and my experience being in her classroom, thinking that I was less than I guess. So, for me... Sorry, I've forgotten what the question was, but for me it's about that experience still lives with me and sits with me too so, how we can kind of change the system.

David Rathman

How did you handle it?

Sasha Hill

I think I went into myself I'm a bit of an introvert so, but then going home to mom and dad and then it's that extra layer of, I guess, innocence that gets taken away from Aboriginal kids so often in the school system. I guess I see it at the moment with my kids as well who are at nine and five kind of going through the system and you see that the school system sometimes isn't set up for Aboriginal kids. My son especially is very outward, he doesn't like to sit in the classroom. Again because that is our ways and that's how I parented him as well, that's my Aboriginal parenting ways, we get out there, we have lots of big yarns and we learn in different experiential ways as opposed to kind of sitting in a classroom, but ultimately it's not doing him well at the moment in a mainstream school system so.

I suppose I don't deal with it very well I think I come in as a very strong fiery mother and I guess I've kind of learnt that from not dealing with it well I guess when I was a teenager going really insular and kind of feeling a bit shame about myself. And unfortunately that's kind of an experience that you take on. It's hard to see pride and to see that in yourself sometimes when everyone else kind of sees you as that stereotype and that bias and not going to do well at school so, I guess I implore teachers to really understand who your people are, who your students are. What your students

need and to really understand what Aboriginal ways of education are and how you can incorporate that into the mainstream school system.

David Rathman

That's good. What about though I'm a non-Aboriginal student in a school. I want to support being brave. I want to support bringing about change. I want talk to people who may not hold the same passion that I do. What tools can that student bring to the table that's going to help them express their view and try and get people around the table to understand our point of view. So, I'm talking not necessarily about us as Aboriginal people, I'm talking about what advice, because we're not talking here to a majority of Aboriginal students sitting there there's many, many students from different cultural backgrounds, but how do they tool up, using a tradesman's term? How do they tool up to be able to put this all together and be able to come forward and support Aboriginal people, even though they've got a negative or indifferent view from their compatriots? I'm going to turn to you, Khyleesha.

Khyleesha

I think it's all about speaking up and standing out, in the sense of, you're not really going to learn anything if you don't put in the work yourself. So, I think it's always good to constantly... Like you said before, constantly ask questions, come up to us, have a conversation because that's probably the best way to learn is that learning from someone who is from that background. I think it's also about doing your own research as well, seeing what you can do to make a difference and how you can support others as well.

David Rathman

Beautiful. Tamaru you go into schools, you talked to lots of people. And we were talking before about some of your experiences. How do you work with those non-Aboriginal students to be able to get them to do what we're saying in reconciliation week 2022. Be brave, try and bring about change even though you've got a lot of negative forces around you?

Tamaru

I encourage schools to do environmental leaders and look at bush tucker and plantings of plants. How Aboriginal people used to manage country. We talk about fire stick farming. We talk about the alternative foods. So, I like pies. And I also do pie charts with schools. And most times in a garden, I will do a normal tomato plant and I'll do a bush tomato plant and I'll give it a litter of water for your tomato plant and a litter of water for bush tomato plant. And we see how much water is needed to make that tree grow and produce fruit. So the normal tomato plant will need two litres of water to grow six tomatoes full of water. Whereas, a bush tomato plant will grow 12 tomatoes, we only need half a litre of water so which would you grow? Let's look at why Aboriginal people have native foods and why it's better.

And our food's full of flavour and small, your food's full of water. So let's look at the environmental aspects. We're the oldest known culture on the planet you'd think we'd know how to look after country. So, through the STEM progress and the HAS programs at schools this is how we encourage non-Aboriginal people to bring their perspective on how to manage country and our perspective. And most times what I do, is I get some of the non-Aboriginal kids to take a tube stock of whether it be knobby club rush, ruby salt bush, or whatever to take it home they grow in their own yard, so they take ownership. And once they take ownership, it really happens and then they immerse themselves in all other aspects of our culture. I think in the English people, they have young packers, it's about reverse psychology.

If you make it their idea they'll make it happen. And most times with schools they love it. They loved bush tucker, gone were the days where we have planner boxes now we have interactive gardens. Where we graze on our way and sit down and eat it. Most times I do an Aboriginal entrance and a non-Aboriginal exit or entrance and they have their product at their end of my product on our end. And we sit and we eat. And when we eat we talk, we learn about things. So I encourage most schools that I work with to do a bush tucker garden. And it works really well. We have edible foods, we have medicine plants, we have plants for

the bird life, we have plants ground dwelling animals, and it's great. You can hang bananas in kindys and butterflies will come.

We can have ruby red salt bushes everywhere with the red berries candy to kids. We can have ruby yellow where we give our non-Aboriginal fellows to the ruby yellow and half an hour they get diarrhea, because it cleanses their insides. So it's all about engaging all aspects of our knowledge. I myself, I cook fish in a ground in clay and we cook a whole fish and clay wrap it like a paste, whack it with a stick, the clay peels automatically the skin off the fish so it de-scales fish leave steam meat there well, we've been cooking like that for years, why aren't you cooking it? I find in the educational space that a lot of non-Aboriginal people we can articulate how to do it, but they just don't get it. We need to show them how to do it. And once you show them how to do it they immerse themselves in the culture so it's... That's the way I like to get in there with them.

David Rathman

Now, Frank, what would you advise students to do who might be wanting to support the cause of Aboriginal people but are confronted with negative views around them? How would you tell them to handle that?

Frank Wanganeen

Yeah, I think just seek out other people that have that sort of experience around conflict and just challenge them. I think it's one way of sort of bringing about change I think to be outspoken and trying to sort of get other people involved. I think it's a way to go and try and have a support mechanism behind them so they can sort of continue on advocating for change.

David Rathman

That's a good comment. Now, in terms of the reconciliation process, we've had a good conversation. We've talked around a number of topics. What would be your final advice to students who are watching?

Frank Wanganeen

I think being a champion of change.

Sasha Hill

I agree going on that allyship journey and making sure that you know what that means and continuing that journey. Also, it's really easy to do a cultural audit of your school. Have a look at, do you have the Aboriginal flag? Are you doing acknowledgements of country? What are you doing to support the Aboriginal community, the local community and your students? It's really easy to do a cultural audit and increment some really actionable change from there.

Tamaru

Definitely encourage every school to get a Reconciliation Action Plan on how to engage and work with Aboriginal people side by side. It's the way to go. It's the way of the future.

Khyleesha

I think it's just about starting the conversation, because I think that's where real change starts. Starting the conversation, see what you can do in your community and kind of coming together as one to create change.

David Rathman

Well, that's an important conversation that we've had today, and I hope students have gained some insight from our guests. Reconciliation is an ongoing journey that reminds us that while generations of Australians afford hard for meaningful changes like these, that we've talked about today, future gains are likely to take just as much time and effort, if not more effort. What I'm encouraging you to do today is to not just listen, but be part of the conversation, because listening can just mean that you are neutral, but if you're part of the conversation you're engaged in supporting us. So thanks for being with us, thanks to our guests this morning and our panel. And let's hope there's real change in the wind. Thank you.

