

## **Reconciliation Seminar 11: First 1000 Days and Embedding Torres Strait Islander Perspectives into Curriculum**

*Transcript from the Reconciliation Series 1 2022*

• 0:03 – 0:41

AJ: Okay. Good evening everyone. Welcome to the 11th reconciliation series broadcast. Just before I do start, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that I'm currently on. I'm here in and broadcasting from my house here on the land of the Wurundjeri people and I pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging. I'd like to extend that to where you are currently tuning in from right across Victoria and I acknowledge elders past and present, but I would also like to acknowledge where you may have grown up because that might be something completely different to where you are now.

• 0:41 – 1:13

AJ: And I'd like to acknowledge your elders because they helped shape who you became today. We're very lucky to actually have the wonderful, the brilliant Kerry Arabeena here with us tonight who is gonna talk about two things. One about the first 1000 days. I was gonna say the first 1000 years, but it's not that long, the first 1000 days! And looking at incorporating Torres Strait Islander perspectives into curriculum.

• 1:14 – 1:29

AJ: So, without any further ado, I'm gonna throw over to Kerry. Be ready to pose questions if you can. Guys, it'll be good to put your camera on cos Kerry is quite interactive with you, so if you can stick your camera on. So, let's go.

• 1:31 – 2:17

Fantastic everyone, thank you so much for the wonderful warm acknowledgement of country AJ. Very much appreciated. I myself am beaming in from Riddles Creek, which is a little suburb in Victoria, regional Victoria. I've been living here since 2017 on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and pay my respects to their elders past, present and those who are emerging. I do have a bit of a presentation that I thought that we could talk through today, which articulates very clearly about where the first thousand days Australian movement came from and how First Nations people shaped the model that's now being implemented in this and two other continents around the world.

• 2:17 – 2:37

And we're also then going to focus in on the curriculum that we've developed up to address first thousand days. And again, you can just see how our curriculum has been

infused with the first thousand days Australia initiatives and Torres Strait Islander thinking as well as aboriginal people's thinking.

• 2:37 - 3:09

I myself have been referred to in a policy or an administrative sense as a Torres Strait Islander who lives on the mainland, in that most of my family were relocated from the Torres Strait come the first World War where many Torres Strait Islanders actually worked alongside our fellow Australian military in making sure that our northern border was safe and secure.

• 3:10 - 3:40

And as a result of that, many of the civilians were shifted off Thursday Island down toward Cairns, Brisbane and Townsville. And where my friend ended up being able to reside was in Cairns. And so my grandmother and father, even though she was born on Murray Island and my dad was born on Torres Strait, where I felt a deeper connection, <laugh> was actually in Cairns, which I still to as my home place.

• 3:41 - 3:49

You'll have to forgive my throat, I'm so very, very sorry everyone, but my throat has just been really mucking up today with the heavy pollen load.

• 3:49 - 4:35

I'm just not coping. So hopefully we will be able to get on and do some talking and sharing anyway. And forgive me, I'm just going to cough and splutter my way some of this. So what I'm going to do now is share the screen with you. Hopefully you will all be able to see it just fine while I move a few things around and I'll come to the slideshow. Thank you everyone. So basically first thousand Days Australia is part of an international movement which was shaped and given strength and momentum by First Nations people here in an Australian context, it started out as a research project through the University of Melbourne.

• 4:35 - 4:49

But since 2018 has been an indigenous business, there are a couple of reasons why I did this. The first is I've left University contexts to set up profit for purpose companies.

• 4:49 - 5:33

And that is to take advantage of the indigenous procurement policy targets that all of your organizations have around contracting and working with indigenous businesses to deliver on key elements of your projects, your processes, evaluation, curriculum development and the like. And also because I was terrified of leaving this particular initiative in the university's context because once the funding is not able to be found for some of these heart projects, they end up being scaled down or wound back and then the next new thing happens.

- 5:33 – 5:56

So I really wanted to maintain the integrity of the first thousand days Australia Council who had a significant impact into what has now become a training course for many people, which is why I'm focusing in on the curriculum today. What we ended up doing in this piece of work of course is acknowledging traditional owners, elders and country.

- 5:57 – 6:28

We believe that first thousand days Australia work absolutely ties us back into the ecosystems of which we are apart. We do this because First Nations peoples do not believe that we are born into a society. We're actually born into ecosystems and we are a really innate part of those ecosystems. But that is why we really focus in on the care for country initiatives through our work.

- 6:28 – 7:10

We also then acknowledge the 60,000 years of genius alive in all of First Nations peoples, particularly in an Australian context. And we do this because the narratives around First Nations peoples families, parenting sense of wellbeing is often framed by the deficit Latin discourses. And we are also getting a whole lot of our children haemorrhaging into the child protection system. So it is more likely that there will be more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children sleeping under the roofs of houses that do not contain any of their biological families in them.

- 7:10 – 7:43

And when we think about that, a lot of the child protection notifications are starting to happen in utero. This is a very important fact for me because I spent a number of years working in child protection services and I understood very clearly about what was happening for our children once they were born and they were being heavily impacted on by their in-utero experiences and sense of empowerment their families had.

- 7:44 – 8:34

And we've found that that has been an incredibly important lens to look at the first thousand days Australia through. We also then acknowledge everyone in the oceanic civilization. We are one island in the middle of the biggest blue continent on earth, which is the oceans that are either side of us. And when we think about our previous ways of connecting in with other First Nations peoples, we were entrepreneurs, we were matriarchs, we had trade lines and song lines that we were trading along all the way through and that is reactivating that sense of entrepreneurial action and opportunity is something that's really fundamental to first thousand days Australia work.

*Between 8:35 and 11:02 we experienced technical difficulties with screen sharing, and this was discussed in the seminar. We have removed it from this transcript for clarity and conciseness.*

So the part of recognizing around that entrepreneurial opportunity and existence is really fundamentally powerful because there are many of our families because of their past history of being justice involved or perhaps having different capabilities in their literacy, all of those kinds of things have actually meant that there are many families who are not able to participate, they're not able to participate in having a job, but there is nothing actually stopping them from having their own business.

• 11:02 – 11:36

And so for us in this business kind of space, we have found that whilst we might not be able to get young people into work as such, what we might be able to do is get them into having an experience where they can get a couple of second-hand mowers and then go around and mow people's lawns. And that's a really powerful thing during this period of time because of the kind of debt load that people are carrying. But we also understand that poverty is an incredible driver during this time of year.

• 11:37 – 11:59

The other thing that we really do with acknowledging traditional owners is and First Nations people is the deep desire for self-determination and the pain of embodied trauma. And what we want to do is pass on intergenerational wealth, not intergenerational trauma to people. And so in terms of that, that's been very, very powerful for us as well.

• 12:00 – 12:31

Myself, I was professor and chair for indigenous health at Monash and the University of Melbourne. I'm currently a mother and a grandmother of three and I own a couple of different businesses. I'm a founder coaching consultant. I have done national and international work in ecology and health and spent a number of years doing sexual and reproductive health through planning. And that is the way that I came into first thousand Days Australia work. It was really through the lens of sexual and reproductive health.

• 12:31 – 13:05

The reason for that is because I saw a lot of sexual coercion happening. Poor relationships, you know, in which children were being born into and the cycles of trauma were becoming so tight and intensified during members of our younger communities, that you could see how all of this played out through not having good access to contraception, not having good access to understanding the quality of relationships that are needed to children into and resource them for a good future.

• 13:06 – 13:38

And also we did a time specific intervention because of the work that I had done in reviewing our Elders health and wellbeing, particularly through dementias and Alzheimer's related illnesses. When I was working with the gerontologist Tony Brough, we were doing a lot of work in regional and remote area Australia and we found that a great majority of our elders were requiring early onset dementias by the age of 45.

• 13:38 - 14:14

And like many others, I thought that it was alcohol related dementias, but in fact that myth that I was carrying, that unconscious bias got completely blown out of the water because it was vascular related dementias, related to chronic illnesses like diabetes, like cardiopathies, those kinds of things. And what we found was that if you wanted to have good quality eldership and a quality of life across all of your life, then a great preventative strategy was to focus on in utero health and wellbeing, which we ended up doing.

• 14:15 - 14:48

So if you can do smoking cessation through that pregnancy period, if you can reduce the experiences of violence and trauma during that period, then you're going to have a greater impact on vascular health and wellbeing across a person's life. And we'll end up with the good quality Elders that we need in our communities to pass on knowledge and transmit the kind of protocols and understandings that have been the mainstay of our cultural connections for such a long time. That is why we started off a campaign by saying, we are not carrying babies.

• 14:49 - 15:12

You are not giving birth to a baby. You're actually got the sacred responsibility of carrying our future elder. And that for a lot of families just changed the conversation and the way that the conversations were happening to be really deeply empowering. The other things that we wanted to address through this model were the developmental vulnerabilities impacting on school attendance.

• 15:13 - 15:59

And where the genesis of the first thousand days Australian model happened in an Australian context was when Tony Abbott, who was prime minister at the time, was putting in place truancy officers as a way to try to get children to attend school. This was particularly in 2014. And I was really curious then about what happens for children who've got developmental vulnerabilities impacting on their school attendance and their ability to learn. Another thing that was happening was task force 1000 here in a Victorian context, there was an audit done of many of the children in out-of-home care arrangements and we found that many children were transitioning out of families into out-of-home care because of chronic stress.

• 15:59 - 16:27

And that was really perpetuated through the experiences of family violence, alcohol and drug misuse and neglect. The third was really about service in integration at regional levels. We found that there was a lot of service fragmentation to overcome and that there was lots of competition for very scant resources and there was a lack of focus from the period of time from conception through till a child's second birthdate.

• 16:27 - 17:08

To do that we really focused in on the needs of adolescents and women of reproductive age, neonates, infants and children during that time boxed period. And we also then took into account the neuroscience of brain development. We acknowledged the powerful contribution that parental incarceration has on children's health and wellbeing and we also then wanted to improve data collection, expand data linkage opportunities, and enable some of our organizations to really coordinate their actions and share best practice and facilitate greater understanding of family context on children's development through the first thousand days.

• 17:08 - 17:31

And from 2014 through to now, what we've had is a series of funds from National Medical N H and M R C. We were able to have funds from Queensland government to really help implement the work from the Department of Social Services and Security, and from the Austral Australian Indonesian centre.

• 17:32 - 18:10

And all of that work together has really developed an evidence base which has been led from indigenous researchers and supported by non-indigenous people's evidence. And we also then identified six very strong implementation pathways. The first one was absolutely focusing in on workforce development. There are a lot of generalists who do not understand the specificity of what it means to create great learning opportunities and to do all the neural health work for families during this period of time.

• 18:10 - 18:33

We also found that many of the services were funded for short periods and so could really get into projects but weren't able to demonstrate the power of the work that they were doing very well. So we took on a lot of the evaluation work. We also then just went through a process of determining very, very strongly that culture is the protective factor for families.

• 18:34 - 19:06

When families are immersed in culture and cultural activities in cultural parenting and cultural contexts, then the need for child protection happens within families, not external to families. We also then set up for entrepreneurial action and business development startups and we gave people like part of our new look workforces, including peer

researchers, we got them ABN numbers, we did references for them and then we helped them transitioning into other work, which was an incredible empowerment process.

• 19:07 - 20:00

And we also then involved community in co-design research strategies. And that was mostly achieved through an intervention which is still being looked at by NH and M R C, which takes into account the aspirations focused household surveys. So we focused on the aspirations that parents had for themselves and for their children. And once those aspirations were acknowledged, we then hooked them up with life coaches and mentors and we did this work in partnership with Aboriginal Housing Victoria and we trained up some of their tenants to be the peer researchers and the kind of outcomes that were able to be generated through that kind of approach with it, 400 of the 600 goals that were nominated by all of those families were able to be achieved in a four month period, which is unbelievable.

• 20:00 - 20:37

It took a lot for the service delivery system to catch up though when you're busy funding deficit focused strategies, it's actually very hard to fund the preventative and aspirational focused families. And so that was really interesting and a core feature of this work. And we also then really focused in on regional strategies and coordination. So it was all also like we became a backbone agency for a range of different organizations that allowed us to have that greater level of coordination, particularly in that period of time from conception until a child's second birthday.

• 20:38 - 21:03

So what we realized was that as a minimum first thousand days, Australia initiatives need to invest in recognizing the cultural roles and responsibilities that both men and women have in the early years. This is because a lot of our men are framed in policy and programs as those who perpetuate family violence, as those who are gamblers or who are addicts.

• 21:04 - 21:40

And the programmatic responses really tailored around that. There's very little recognition of men's capacity for caring, their ability to nurture and the fact that they've got very, very strong cultural roles to perform at the early inception of their families. And as a result of this work, I'm very pleased to say that Jack Baldman, who was one of my master's students, ended up doing a piece of work called First Nation's Fathering during the first thousand days and what kind of supports men needed to make that transition, particularly during becoming first time fathers.

• 21:40 - 22:01

And we found that a lot of programmatic responses were delivered through a highly feminized workforce in things like mums and bubs programs, mums you know, maternal

health and wellbeing and that there actually wasn't much work going on with First Nations fathers around what that experience would be like for them.

• 22:02 - 22:35

We also then looked at ceremonial engagement activities and what we could do to reactivate ceremony in community. And we've ended up doing a whole lot of Welcome baby to country ceremonies and some of those have been delivered on country for the first time in 128 years, which has been really exciting. And we also then focus in on the right skills and knowledge for parents to care for their children by really activating the kinship networks around people and designing kin-centric workforces.

• 22:35 - 23:00

So instead of having a professional look after you, kind of really working within the extended family context to elevate those kin-centric roles and responsibilities of auntie, what it means to be a grandmother without overburdening grandmas to be the primary carers of their children. We also did the roles of elder cousins, uncles, those kinds of things in the children's lives.

• 23:01 - 23:42

We also then did have a look at the biological processes and environmental characteristics of the places in which people lived. And that could include doing things like micro histories to understand the impact of First Nations parenting. We also then had a look at regional stories and the intergenerational trauma impacts as well as yarning circles and empowerment programs. So to emphasize the strategies that we did use, they were all strength-based approaches to parenting to give our babies best start in life, that really did empower parents culturally and reactivate the cultural responsibilities across families.

• 23:43 - 24:29

We also then did the family-based entrepreneurial solutions to welfare dependence, looking at micro-business solutions, establishing family-based and local enterprises because in my view, nepotism really does work in family businesses, not necessarily in community-controlled organizations, right idea, wrong legal underpinning. We also then focused in on adversary approaches and a lot of work has gone on in this space internationally, which really putting in place an intervention where children are set down and their eyes are guided to focus in on key elements of books and or other kinds of natural processes that they've got access to.

• 24:30 - 25:40

And of course then nutrition programs, family planning, building workforce awareness on how to engage dads and improving access to comprehensive primary healthcare. And



that was the really important thing for grandmothers and mothers to take leadership on to help design interventions that families would feel okay about being part of. We also then looked at working through business opportunities and creating ways to relieve the debt cycles that many of our families are on during this really important period of time creates chronic stressors, some of which have been, is enormously exacerbated through the natural disasters as well as the shut down over the covid period of time and into communities and behind closed doors we saw an elevation and an escalation of family violence in ways that many first time perpetrators were also ringing up helplines for support cos that's not what they wanted to do, but the chronic stress was such that they felt like they needed to.

• 25:40 - 26:12

The other thing that's become very important during covid for us to understand is that the mental health decline within fathers during this period of time has been excessive. And that is because they haven't been able to participate in the routines that help give their life meaning and purpose. That whole idea about providing for your family was completely disrupted during covid. So instead of some of the most resilient members of our families, they're now the most compromised in terms of mental health and wellbeing.

• 26:13 - 27:00

The other thing that we do is really powerful because we do have evidence now that shows that relieving poverty, particularly during this period of time, has been shown to increase birth weight and other outcomes, which can reduce the likelihood of negative health and wellbeing being experienced by that person later in life. So when people have reduced the chronic stress and when they have got an opportunity to at least live comfortably every fortnight and when they feel like they're in control of their debt, then it has a fantastic outcome on birth weight and opportunity, which is why we focus a lot of effort on business opportunities in creating other pathways to relieve debt.

• 27:01 - 27:39

In terms of what we've done to promote the sacred responsibility of carrying our future elders, when we work through a cultural lens, we do things like really focusing in on ceremonial options, including welcome babies to country. And then we've got some really clear messages that are really focused in on cultures. So modern matriarchs, what does it mean to mean to be a modern matriarch in the family rather than a teenage mother who's not got parenting skills to look after her children.

• 27:40 - 28:11

We also then focus in on pristine pregnancies and we talk about the power of those pristine pregnancies as being the child's first experience of being culturally safe is in utero. And so what are we actually doing for that in utero experience to create cultural safety

rather than again putting that responsibility out there on professionals, really talking about the personal responsibility to create that culturally safe environment.

- 28:14 - 28:47

We've also got a couple of charters of the rights of children yet to be conceived and also then the right for our men to be acknowledged for their kindness and their capacity for nurturance without embedding those negative discourses around all of our men. And so we've done 'our men, our shields', which really speaks to the powerful roles that men play during that early part of the formation of their families. And all of those are available off our website.

- 28:48 - 29:17

The other things that we do in terms of culture-based activities is involve Elders as residents in places when we are talking about sharing knowledge, we also have elders from that place to talk about the birthing stories. Go visit birth victories, trees, talking about um, cultural parenting practices. We talk about men's and women's roles and responsibilities during those early days. And men as it turns out, are responsible for nutrition.

- 29:17 - 29:54

So if you are giving nutritional advice to anyone other than the partners or men involved in that young child's life and growth cycles, then we are not acknowledging the cultural roles that men play. We've also done naming ceremonies where children are named and presented. We've had people make resources for our cultural activities including, coolamons, kangaroo pelts, possum skin cloaks, certificates of birthing which has on them their parents' lineage and their country that they're from.

- 29:54 - 30:40

And evidence of improvements with introductions of smoking ceremonies so that mothers can have access to smoking ceremonies through hospital-based services now. And the Gold Coast Hospital in Queensland was a great example of how that happened because not many of our families have been asked about their aspirations. What we've also done in the curriculum that we've designed for our courses is to have embedded within a masterclass which teaches people to facilitate aspirations focused activities including household surveys, AHA workshops, which is about aspirations, hopes and ambitions on how to live, love, learn, and leave a legacy.

- 30:41 - 31:17

We get families to work on developing vision boards and journey sticks and they also then have access to life coaches, cultural mentors, cultural healing practices and the like. And that's been a very, very powerful way of being able to embed some of the regional strategies but also allow First Nations families to lead. The other thing that we've done is

implement the regional strategies in a couple of different locations. So what we've found is that this can work not only in an Australian context as it's led by First Nations families, but in international contexts as well.

- 31:17 - 31:43

It's one of the few in indigenous driven, led, designed, developed, evaluated programs that's been able to scale into other countries. And I'll get to that in just a little moment. But where we have landed this work is in the Gold Coast region, in the Yarra Valley, Shepparton, in Dandenong, Townsville, Morton Bay, Mount Isa, La Trobe Valley and Mornington Peninsula.

- 31:44 - 32:17

There are a couple of other initiatives that are also called First Thousand Days, but they're not auspiced or recognized by First thousand Days Australia cos they are not as comprehensive in the way that we do our work as they're delivering through those programs. We've really referred to this as a movement, not a program cos as I found out through the university, programs can get defunded. But movements you have to be very clear about who you take money from and why because not all money is good money.

- 32:18 - 32:46

So we could have had this funded a thousand times over by Twiggy Forest's outfit, but my board when we are setting this up so that we should not take monies from those companies that are degrading our environments cos the our environments are actually part of our long-term future and really bringing our children up in the 21st century requires them to have that ecological understanding and appreciation, which has been very, very powerful for us.

- 32:46 - 33:29

But it means it's been unfunded for a long time because of the emphasis on prevention in tertiary focused institutions has been hard. But it's also really powerful now because we can determine who it is that we would like to work with and the reasons why. The international strategies have been implemented in the Arctic Circle with Tromsø University. And that was funded out of the Sami Parliament for Sami people. So we actually did three visits to Norway to work with social workers in those regions to implement first thousand days with Sami in that region, which was very exciting and they focused in on language revitalization interestingly.

- 33:29 - 33:55

And then we also did work with the Australian Indonesia partnership where we completed tours involving Indonesian government officials, educators and early childhood specialists in Australia and in Indonesia. And we also then focused in on the medicinal

quality of native bush foods in particular for health and wellbeing, folate and others for that very important first thousand days period of time.

• 33:56 – 34:27

So in terms of where we're at now, we've got a whole range of charters that you can download off our website for free and they are very clear and aspiration focused. We've also got a set of affirmation cards that were developed up again by First Nations peoples, but can be used in different contexts. So I have given these cards to workers so that they can use them with their families, they can give out particular cards where the parents can hold onto them and refer to them.

• 34:27 – 34:47

Often people have set up little altars in their homes or put it on their fridge for their kids to be looking at. And that was a real lovely little family affair in that my niece is a medical illustrator so she did all the drawings and I did all the words, but it's basically again, following on from those ideas.

• 34:47 – 35:33

So the first one is: I am not alone. I'm surrounded by love for my child and my community and I am needed. My baby relies on me to hold and nurture them through life. So just some of those kind of other expectations that might be there from a parental point of view, that is really powerful. We also then do the embodiment of cultural healing practices through Wayyappa and focusing in on earth mind mindfulness. And what we've ended up doing was developing an online course as part of our digital pivot, which has been really clear and I've just had to refilm whole thing actually as part of our commitment to curriculum to take into account the fact that no one wants to watch me talking for 20 minutes at a time.

• 35:33 – 35:36

So I really do appreciate all of you paying attention here.

• 35:36 – 36:08

It is hard work people, but I'm truly grateful. And then the other thing was that we really did build into some of the experiences what we were seeing reflected around the continent in terms of natural disasters and breastfeeding and protecting the rights of infants and neonates during that time. So in the first module we really focus in on why we acknowledge country, how we work with layered meal, meaning in terms of First Nation's knowledge and western knowledge and how those things actually work together.

• 36:08 – 36:29

We focus in on the criticality of the first thousand days and then supporting and extending the concepts of family that we are familiar with. Working in the second module is really

focusing in on the work that you are doing, which is reconciliation at the early years and putting children's voices in the center and then how to do infant led therapeutic interventions.

- 36:29 – 37:03

So, when you are doing family therapy work, how you really lead from the infant and you can see from the infant's eyes how they're looking, whether their body is stiff, how they engage with how they're feeling about the work, and then using their children's experience to kind of relate that to parental interventions has been very powerful. We also then focus in on, in module three look at the cultural determinants of health and wellbeing, by introducing people to our sciences, to community voices and really hearing what people want.

- 37:04 – 37:38

Talking about cultural determinants and early years interventions and how to use and approach indigenous knowledges. And then really focusing in on policy innovation. And then the fifth module focuses in on how to develop regional plans, what it means to have an entrepreneurial workforce to facilitate some of the cultural healing programs. And then finally we've developed up the masterclass, which is really looking at AHA workshops and focusing in on those key aspirations that people hold for themselves and for their children.

- 37:38 – 38:14

So in terms of that, we've got our website, which is [www.first1000daysaustralia.com](http://www.first1000daysaustralia.com). So it's all words except for the thousand, which is 1 0 0 0. We're also on Facebook as First 1000 Days Australia, and we post a lot of information, our course content, those kinds of things that we've spent a lot of time doing, including getting the courses accredited. And that was really important for us because we didn't want to go down an RTO route.

- 38:14 – 38:44

We did want it to be meaningful for people who came and did like the two-day face-to-face course, which is what we're able to do again now. And then people have access to the online modules to really deepen or have knowledge to go back to and other additional resources online. But we've been able to accredit it through CPD points. So continuing professional development points through a wide range of associations, professional bodies and the like.

- 38:44 – 39:31

So it's currently registered through R A C G P, the community workers, social workers associations and the like. We couldn't actually get micro-credentialing, but we could get the professional associations to have a look at all the modules, understand how powerful the modules in the curriculum are for people who are part of the workforce, particularly facing in wood to that first thousand days. And I'm hoping that that's given you both an

overview of First Thousand Days Australia, the movement and where we're at and what it is that we are focusing in on now, which is the online course development, getting that accredited and now reprinting, the two-day workshops for people where they get access to a whole lot of information.

• 39:31 - 40:17

They've got a chance to really think about how they can embed cultural determinants of health and wellbeing in their work and activate some of those ceremonial observances that are very, very important for First Nations families. So AJ I will leave it there for now and thank you so much everyone for your time. Really appreciate the fact that you can listen to what's coming up to eight years' worth of my life. It's really a very strong passion project that has taken me around Australia and the world and I just couldn't be more proud of efforts of everyone who's gone toward implementing and contributing toward our course and the actions that will keep our children safe and with their families at home

40:18 - 40:19

Thank you everyone for your time.

40:17 - 41:04

AJ: You got time for questions?

• 40:04 - 40:05

Absolutely.

• 40:05 - 42:32

AJ: I just wanna add first as, as a maternal health nurse for the first 1000 years, I wish - days - the first time I, yeah. 1000 days. Sorry. 1000 years. Again, it will be very old. Uh, the first 1000 days. I wish that when I was doing my nursing in the eighties that we actually had the first 1000 days then.

• 42:32 - 43:06

Now, it's really interesting that you say that AJ, because I have done a lot of training for maternal nurses and the kind of in-depth work that we get into, particularly around the neuroscience of development during that period of time is not talked about and the emphasis is on the biological carrying of children. So maternal health and wellbeing, rather, the cultural and familial contexts into which those children are born. And maternal nurses have a really important role to play during that period of time.

• 43:06 - 44:08

So thank you for acknowledging that.

• 44:09 - 44:42

AJ: Guys, any questions for Kerry while she's here? You guys have always got questions. I know, I know. They're there, Kerry, they've been sending messages through that say, "thank you very much. Very impressive. Thank you. Amazing efforts. Thank you very much. Thanks, Kerry. It sounds like such valuable, valuable work." So I'm seeing the comments go through any questions.

• 44:42 - 45:20

I've just put in the chat box for everyone. Our website, there is a whole lot of resources that you can have access to there, including those charters. Just download them, work them into your work where you can, put posters up on the walls, those kinds of things. When people enrol in courses, they get some other kind of posters that really do emphasize those preceding pregnancies. You can have a look at the course online. I think we've got some flyers there about the kind of information that's currently available in those courses and also then the different places that they're registered to.

• 45:20 - 45:49

But you can join us on our Facebook page. I think we're doing some promotions as we get into the new year, on the course content and sale of those courses. And I just wanted to be able to say that as an indigenous business, I'm very, very clear that we are a profit for purpose company. So I'd love to be driving a Bentley or a Range Rover, but I'm just so not there yet <laugh>.

• 45:51 - 46:33

I think I'm gonna be there for some time. So most of the profits that we use from this actually goes back into further community initiatives including language revitalization. So I've just started up a whole new brand, if any of you are tea drinkers. We've just made a whole brand of tea from Island style, which is focusing in on the Torres Straits. And we are looking to revitalize endangered languages in the Torres and also then to provide scholarships for Torres Strait Islanders to attend universities and the like being the first Torres Strait Islander professor, I think I have an obligation to continue people along that pathway.

• 46:33 - 47:06

And so anything that comes into the organisation is used very powerfully, very, very powerfully indeed. So the affirmation cards are also available there. I think they're \$11 a pack. They are also really beautiful to have a look at and can be enormously comforting for people who are in deep need of something. Just to hold onto while we're going through a really hard time and we found that the feedback that we are getting is really very beautiful.

• 47:08 - 47:17

AJ: Now, Kerry, we do have a question. How do you support separated and alienated parents to see each other's roles as vital to the child's wellbeing?

• 47:17 - 47:47

Yep. That's really of such a good question. Because it's not only parents who themselves have separated from each other, but it's also about children who have been forcibly removed from their parents. And so usually what we've found is that institutional involvement is absolutely part of that relationship and becomes fundamental to that relationship.

• 47:48 - 48:23

So often it's mediated through social workers or child protection agencies or we're finding that the transference of power to out of home agencies that are community controlled are having a greater impact in this space. But one of the ways that we do work culturally is to have men's and women's groups and they can be facilitated by Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander men and women separately. A lot of the gendered roles and responsibilities were actually done separately when it comes to children's care and wellbeing.

• 48:23 - 48:57

And that's part of the reason why we reactivate this kin-centric workforce. So reactivating all those cultural roles and responsibilities in extended family organizations because as we are all going to find going into the 21st century, it will be more than ever powerful for villages to raise children. It will be increasingly difficult for two adults who've got compromised life experiences themselves, where they might not have the resources to parent well or even to have a relationship well.

• 48:58 - 49:26

That's why we really emphasize those cultural practices, cultural healing, men's and women's roles and responsibilities. And then while we've also emphasized men's roles and responsibilities through 'Our Men, Our Shields' in particular, we've found that we've had to do lots of conversations with men and women around equity in a household. Like what does it mean to take equal share in parenting?

• 49:27 - 50:00

Fathers are not babysitting their kids when the wife goes out to go and do stuff, they're actually parenting. But what we've done as a professional workforce is undermine the parenting roles and responsibilities cos we've assumed a professional role in the quality of those relationships except when the times when we really needed to be part of them, which is often three o'clock in the morning when there's a meltdown happening of some kind. So we're not engaged with magistrates or family courts.

• 50:00 - 50:30



But part of the cultural mentoring and cultural workforce really does help bring culture as the basis for which children's wellbeing is experienced. And sometimes that can be reliant on parents being hostile toward each other during that period of time, or it's around activating those extended family responsibilities to really help those parents engage with children. Well, thank you. That was a very powerful question.

• 50:31 – 50:46

AJ: Any more questions? Just checking some of the feedbacks come directly to me rather than... Well done. Thank you Kerry. Thank you, Kerry. Thank you, Kerry. Thank you, Kerry. Thank you. Thank you, Kerry.

• 50:47 – 50:52

AJ: Are the parenting traditions fairly uniformed for Aboriginal and Torres people?

• 50:53 – 51:40

That's a good question as well. And again, what we've found is that whilst there are some genuine parenting roles and responsibilities that own can be done by men and women, in their parenting roles, a lot of it will depend on the places where people live. So cultural parenting practices might be different if you live near an ocean, have access to a beach, you require going inland toward birthing trees, whether you are in the desert and you've got different elements of being smoked or smoking for some places, for example, it's really healing for parents to be smoked at the time of birth.

• 51:40 – 51:54

But in other places they've said, no, you can't do that because it is helping people move on to the dream time. And that is why it's really important for us to check in with the elders and have the elders lead responses to those kind of initiatives in those local places.

• 51:55 – 52:31

And we are heavily reliant on the community-controlled organisations to help us find the elders. Or we go back to ATSI, which is the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, which has got large information sources on culture, language and parenting. Some of that is embedded in the languages that have nearly now been lost. And so the digitization projects through there are very, very powerful because the environments in some way teach us how to do parenting.

• 52:31 – 52:50

And as a species, like as a mammal, we all have ways in which we parent that are specific to being mammalian. And in other places then there are cultural anomalies, but that's usually led by the ecosystems in which those cultural practices are led.

• 52:50 – 53:11

AJ: Kerry, we've got one more question here and that is, do you think that Torres Strait Islander culture is, or I would say perspectives as well, there rather culture is often not, I'm just trying to read is, is not oh, is often left out of curriculum development.

• 53:11 – 53:45

Yes it is. I am wildly cranky as a Torres Strait Island woman <laugh> and it's not very many places I get to be able to say this. But thank you for the question because I find that a lot of the fantastic initiatives for First Nations people in this country and the world is actually led by Torres Strait Islanders. So disrupting Terra Nullius as an example was done by Torres Strait Islanders, which has now benefited, the Land Rights Movement in Australia and internationally.

• 53:45 – 54:09

And Mabo law has become part of the international arrangements which are very, very powerful for First Nations people around the world. Again, Torres Strait Islanders have taken the Australian government to the UN on issues of climate change and the fact that they've not paid attention to government's responsibilities to protect cultural groups as a result of the work.

• 54:10 – 54:49

I think sometimes we forget that there are two indigenous nations or two indigenous peoples within First Nations in an Australian context. And a lot of the recent experiences I've had have been about discrimination because of the capitalization of the word indigenous. It loses the specificity of Torres Strait Islanders and of Aboriginal people. And so when we use Indigenous, for example in the National Indigenous Australians Agency, there are very few ways in which I have an understanding of how Torres Strait Islanders are influential in that arrangement.

• 54:49 – 55:12

In that we are not part of the executive, we are not not brought into consultation groups and the like. But our life ways are enormously powerful and we're not subject to the kind of disruption that aboriginal peoples experienced. We've still got all of our languages being spoken even though they are endangered.

• 55:12 – 55:46

Even though we were able to move away from our homelands, we were able to bring our culture and dances and other feastings and other strategies into different countries and where we live. And um, some of us just needed to leave the Torres Straits because we couldn't cook <laugh>. I can't cook to save my life, but I can write five papers, five books I should say in a year. So, you know, you've just gotta play to your strengths where you're at.

But if you get the chance to work with Torres Strait Island people, we are genuinely very kind.

• 55:46 – 55:55

Happy to share knowledge and happy to work alongside people so that you get the best of both worlds for the children whose care you are responsible for.

• 55:55 – 56:07

AJ: The last question we've got is what steps would you suggest we take as educators to decolonize our own teaching and partnership practices with children, colleagues and families? What a wonderful question.

• 56:09 – 56:39

That is a wonderful question. The first is, I would say come and do the course. Just say because what we do then is really focus in on not so much decolonizing our mind cos that is very, very difficult to do in a hugely colonized world. And all of us, I believe are caught up in the processes of post colonialization in that the wealth of those individuals who are incredibly wealthy around the world is growing.

• 56:40 – 57:24

And the poverty experience of a great many number of our species – totalling 8 billion now – is in poverty. And so what we've got is an unusual experience where we've got the largest number of everyone alive at any time in the evolution of our species ever. That is extraordinary to me. And so it's not so much about decolonizing but really bringing into effect the fact that we are living in the 21st century and sometimes 20th century institutions practices, ways of known being doing will not suit a 21st century life experience.

• 57:25 – 57:56

And because of the environmental degradation there will be more pandemics, there will be more uncertainty about weather patterns. The predictability will be less. And so what we've got to do, I think, is really find ways of living and teaching how to sit easily with uncertainty cos that's going to be the feature of everything going forward in the course. What we do is teach something called 50 questions and it is a technique that's grounded in the theory of diffusion of innovation.

• 57:56 – 58:21

So how do you diffuse innovation through all of these living networks and systems? And that for me is probably a much better point to get to rather than decolonizing because I'd say to decolonize, just get out of the institutions that you're taking a salary from and become an entrepreneur. It's tough going, I know how to sit with uncertainty really clearly now.

• 58:22 – 59:04

That's not about decolonizing, it's just accepting that I feel and experience harm taking a salary from those institutions that are not serving us going forward. And so I don't. What it gives me a chance to do now is set up those 15 year olds who are also disengaged from education processes. I said, that is just so fantastic. You must be just like Richard Branson. He didn't finish high school either. And I think for First Nations peoples, what we need to do is build a generation of entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial thinking and actors, rather than employees because employees is very much a 20th century construct.

• 59:04 – 59:22

Whereas being able to utilize Etsy, to be able to utilize TikTok, to be able to generate income from virtual and other worlds will be really interesting. I think more so than decolonization, what's going to happen is that we will see this digital divide start to happen among family members.

• 59:23 – 60:02

And so the digital divide will mean that there'll be digital insecurity in houses where you might have a payment plan, kids won't have access to iPads to do their homework on or to engage with, or we are getting a lot of children now that are getting screens in front of their faces. And what that's doing is carving particular neural pathways for them and not actually having those real life engaged conversations. They're getting talked through a screen. And that for me is a much greater concern for all of us as opposed to decolonization as such.

• 60:03 – 60:27

Course. Thanks, Kerry. It's come to the hour or just outta the hour. I do need to wrap it all up. I've known Kerry for many years, and I can listen to her talk about anything really. And it makes it sound so exciting. I hope to listen to her for hours.

• 60:28 – 61:00

Sorry. I do have a PhD in environmental science, which is probably why you're picking up on a lot of the things, but there's very few social workers who've become environmental scientists. But that is absolutely because I can see that environment is going to be a fundamental element of what it is that we need to educate going forward. And I do believe that there are a lot of First Nations and western science knowledges that can be really powerful in that time. But how do we tune into them as parent? How do we tune into them as educators?

• 61:01 – 61:10

How do we bring those experiences into our own homes? And that I think is, um, the big challenge. So, thank you everyone. Thank you. Great question.

- 62:11 – 62:18

AJ: Good. If you could take your microphones off for one minute and to give Kerry a round of applause that she can actually hear. Oh, that would be really, great.

- 62:23 – 62:25

Kerry: Thank you everyone. Thank you so much.