

Reconciliation Seminar 5: Understanding VACCA

Transcript from the Reconciliation Series 1 2022

• 0:00 – 0:36

To the fifth, seminar series in the Reconciliation series with AJ. Before we do start, I'd like to acknowledge traditional owners of the land that I'm currently on. I'm here in Balwyn Kew on the Land of the Wurundjeri people I pay respect to their elders past, present, and emerging. I send that to lands that you are currently on, at the moment, wherever you are across Victoria, and pay respect to elders past and present. But I also like to extend that to the lands where you may have grown up on, because that could be somewhere completely different than you are now.

• 0:36 – 0:56

And I wanna pay respect to your elders past and present because that helped shape who you became today. For people who don't know me, my name's AJ Williams. My background's Wiradjuri Wotjobaluk. I'm an aboriginal man who is, a trained, nurse, social worker, youth worker.

• 0:57 – 1:27

And I've been working with AGECS as their, cultural consultant for the last, maybe two, three years. And I'm currently one of their reconciliation ambassadors, which were appointed last, uh, last month. Tonight, we've actually got a very, uh, special guest speaker coming in. Kathy Healy from VACCA. She'll explain any more detail, but is the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency.

• 1:29 – 1:49

I'm not gonna intro, I've got a little briefing on Cath, but I'm gonna let her, introduce herself. So I'm just gonna throw straight over to, Catherine, welcome you tonight to the fifth seminar series.

• 1:51 – 2:28

Thank you AJ, and good evening everybody. As AJ said, my name's Cathy Healy. I'm the Senior education advisor with the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge, the lands of the traditional owners that we all gather on this

evening. I'm on Wurundjeri country, this evening and I'd like to pay my respect to elders past, present and emerging.

• 2:28 - 2:42

I would also like to pay my deepest respect to my Aboriginal colleagues that I work alongside at VACCA and also to the children, families, and carers that we work with through our many programs and services at VACCA.

• 2:45 - 3:18

This is an overview of what I'd like to talk about this evening. I'm really happy to take questions at the end. Please use the chat while I'm sharing different aspects of our organization with you. AJ's gonna monitor the chat, so I'm really happy to take questions at any point. I'm gonna give you a bit of an introduction to VACCA and then have a little bit of a talk about why we do the work that we do. I'm gonna touch on government policies and initiatives that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the zero to five space.

• 3:18 - 3:35

And I understand you've had presentations from other Aboriginal peak bodies, over the last few seminars. So you may hear some of those things again. I'm also gonna talk about the early childhood supports and services that we provide to children, families, and carers

• 3:44 - 4:02

So just to begin with, I'm going to play you a short video, where our CEO Auntie Murial Bamblett gives a quick overview of what our organization does. I think it's always best to hear it from the top. So I'm gonna play this. It goes for about four minutes.

• 4:09 - 4:45

VACCA is a child and family welfare organization established over 40 years ago by a Auntie Molly Dyer and is really about the preservation and strengthening of Aboriginal children and families and keeping children connected to their culture. The numbers of children now of in care are significantly high, greater over representation, a lot of vulnerable families, a lot of traumatized children that are in the system that, you know, doesn't understand Aboriginal culture. So, it's really important that we have organizations that are about keeping children safe, working with families to get children home.

• 4:45 - 5:19

And we offer the best services to Aboriginal children and families that has grown. We're an organization that was predominantly about placing children, removing children. We've

now grown to an organization where we are much stronger in putting children back into their home. We run playgroups, we run early intervention parenting programs, stronger programs. We run residential care services. So, we run the full continuum of programs for, for children and families in the out of home care system. And the biggest gain for us is when we see children go back home.

• 5:20 – 5:46

The playgroup actually involves young children. We actually use the word no and belong. The first one is Neal, which is Belong. Children know that they actually belong to the community and they know where they come from.

• 5:47 – 6:05

They have put cultural relevance on the child protection out of home care agenda, and their advocacy workers being second to none. And then in, in their service delivery, they've been creative. They've got multiple programs, they've engaged with carers, they've engaged with communities, they've engaged with the kids.

• 6:07 – 6:36

I think it's important that aboriginal people, given our over representation, given the history of removal and the numbers of children that have been placed in institutions, and now we've got second, third generation of children. We've got five generations of children that we've dealt with within out of home care. We've gotta break the cycle of removal. Too many of our children end up in juvenile justice, criminal justice, too many die too young, too many are in family violence, drug and alcohol. So, it's really important that we break that cycle.

• 6:38 – 7:06

I think the thing about VACCA governance is that they've spent a lot of time recording it and educating people on why they run an internal structure the way they do. Uh, there's a deep attachment with within it to Aboriginal culture and heritage. It influences everything they do and the style of how they go about things as a cooperative. Nevertheless, developing a very, you know, clear board structure and strong place for the ceo and a good linkage between that and the kind of programs they develop.

• 7:08 – 7:32

We've gone through an accreditation process and we met, you know, five categories of those eight, areas exceedingly. So, I think Aboriginal services are doing well. I think the indigenous governance awards are important. They send a message about the

importance of good governance, but also about the role of, you know, reconciliation in promoting the best interests of our people more, more broadly.

• 7:33 – 7:40

I come to organizations like VACCA and I think, could we survive without these organizations? And I think the answer to that is no.

• 7:53 – 8:25

So a little bit of the history about how VACCA was first established. So, in the sixties and seventies, there was a ground swell of ACT activism in the fight for self-determination. And there were two organizations that were established, VAHS, as we call it, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and VALS, the Victorian Aboriginal legal Service. In 1972, VAHS held a special meeting at 99 King Street Melbourne to discuss plans for the establishment of a VAHS building.

• 8:26 – 8:56

VAHS began to service the community from 229 Gertrude Street Fitzroy. In 1979, VAHS moved to a larger property at Gertrude Street Fitzroy. Due to the lack of funding, VAHS staff worked without pay for four months to ensure the continuation of the health service. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service was established in 1973 as a community controlled cooperative society.

• 9:03 – 9:35

The Victorian Aboriginal legal Service first began advocating for change for aboriginal children and families. From the early 1970s, VALS appeared for aboriginal children in the Children's court. VALS began to up highlight urgent concerns about what they were seeing in the system regarding Aboriginal children being removed from their families.

• 9:35 – 9:41

Being removed from their families, 18 to 20 times higher than other Australian children.

• 9:42 – 10:26

Being victims of non-Aboriginal adoption, numerous foster care breakdowns being placed in institutions. The Victorian Aboriginal legal service wanted to find placement alternatives and support within the Victorian Aboriginal community. VALS further identified that 90% of its clients in criminal matters had been removed from their families as children. They'd also been victims of failed adoptive and foster care arrangements, and it meant that many of these young people were homeless and more importantly, unaware of who they really were or where their families came from.

• 10:27 – 10:37

As a result of lobbying, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service was founded to operate a hostel for clients in need of emergency and crisis accommodation.

• 10:43 – 11:18

When talking about how VACCA does its work, we must recognize that VACCA is an acco. So, it's an aboriginal community-controlled organization. The definition of an Aboriginal community-controlled organization is the local Aboriginal community, having control of issues that directly affect their community, meaning that Aboriginal people must determine and control the pace, shape, and manner of change in decision making at all levels.

• 11:19 – 11:36

At VECCA, that means that our organizational structure empowers local communities in making decisions for the communities that we work with. VACCA membership and board consists of aboriginal community members only, and our board ensure that we are answerable to the community.

• 11:44 – 12:19

So now I'm just gonna talk to you a little bit about VACCAs current strategic plan, which was launched this year, and we'll take us through to 2025. So, our vision, Aboriginal Self-determination, lived experience and our purpose, supporting culturally strong, safe, and thriving aboriginal communities. There are a number of principles and values that underpin our strategic plan, including respect, excellence, self-determination, healing and empowerment.

• 12:20 – 12:56

The best interest of the child and aboriginal cultural observance back as the lead or peak body in Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare in Victoria. It's the largest aboriginal organization, Countrywide. We have, various, regional offices. We have three offices at Preston, two offices in the south at Dandenong and Frankston, one in the east at Churnside Park. Two offices in the west at Melton and three regional officers located at Wangaratta, Wodonga, and Morwell.

• 12:57 – 13:24

Across all of these locations, we now have over 800 staff. I heard today that we're nearly at 900. So, it's a huge organization that's grown from only 30 staff in, in the early days to

now almost 900 staff. And we offer approximately 70 different programs and services. The staffing ratio of aboriginal non-aboriginal staff at VACCA is about 50 50.

• 13:32 - 14:09

So now, I just wanna have a little bit of a talk about some of the things that we know have impacted or had huge impact on Aboriginal communities and in order to understand and engage in a culturally responsive way. When we're working with Aboriginal children, their families, or carers and their communities, it's really important that we understand the impacts of colonization on these communities. Before colonization, throughout Australia, there was 250 plus individual nations and an estimated population of 750,000.

• 14:09 - 14:40

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander of people. The land and the spirituality are the foundations on which aboriginal culture has been built. Both are the key determinants of aboriginal culture, traditions, customs and complex belief systems. Extensive knowledge of environment. For 60,000 years, aboriginal people sustained and lived off the land through the passing down of knowledge of the environment and how to care for it.

• 14:41 - 15:15

Kinship and social structures. Aboriginal communities were built on highly structured, developed kinship networks. These complex systems formed the social structure of a tribe and described the relationships for each other, roles, responsibilities, and community obligations. Children knew who they were in relationship to their family, their kin, their people, and their environment. These relationships give meaning to a child's identity by defining how they were connected to everyone and everything in their life.

• 15:16 - 15:47

Traditional law is connected to the dreaming. It governs all aspects of traditional life and provides rules on how to interact with the land, kinship, and community. There was a strict adherence to this law and punishment supplied if breached or broken language and ceremony. All of this cultural knowledge, tradition and wisdom was passed down through thousands of generations, either orally through storytelling or song, or through art.

• 15:47 - 15:58

Dance and ceremonies colonization result to dispossession and almost complete destruction of the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

• 16:06 - 16:12

And so, this is the system that was strong for Aboriginal communities. Recolonization.

• 16:23 – 16:58

As a result of the 1995 national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission published the Bringing Them Home Report and tabled it to the Australian Federal Parliament on the 26th of May, 1997. This report highlighted the key findings of the inquiry. Put forward 54 recommendations for parliament concluded that indigenous families and in and communities have endured gross violations of their human rights.

• 16:58 – 17:14

These violations continue to affect indigenous people's lives daily. They're an active genocide, wiping out indigenous families, communities, and cultures vital to the precious and unable and label heritage of Australia.

• 17:21 – 17:52

And the three key effects of the stolen generation on Aboriginal families today. These are the effects that are still being felt through intergenerational trauma. Number one, separation from primary care. It's, number two, Aboriginal parenting skills are undermined and their children are at risk of being removed. Number three, loss of culture and connection. I'm just gonna show you another brief clip which comes from the Healing Foundation.

• 17:52 – 17:58

And it's a really good explanation of the effects of intergenerational trauma,.

• 18:09 – 18:15

The story of our communities, people that starts a long, long time.

• 18:33 – 18:35

This was when our culture and

• 18:43 – 18:46

We knew who we were, we belonged.

• 19:52 – 20:20

The story of our communities, people, our Nation starts a long, long time ago, more than 60,000 years. In fact, this was when our culture and our law first started to thrive.

• 20:26 – 20:53

We knew who we were and where we belonged. We took care of each other, our land and our waters. We ate food that made us healthy, lived on country and abided by our laws and song lines. Our families, our children, children were happy with strong minds and hearts because they were where they belonged.

- 21:03 - 21:06

But then everything changed.

- 21:08 - 21:22

Colonization came bringing wars, disease, famine, violence, and the destruction and violation of our cultural laws, sacred sites, families and communities.

- 21:22 - 21:37

We were denied our knowledge, language, ceremonies and identity, the very things that tell us who we are and where we belong and our connections with each other. And the land grew weak.

- 21:37 - 21:52

And then our children were taken from us. They had their names changed and their identity stripped away. They were told that aboriginal people were bad, were still, they were told that their parents and grandparents did not want them.

- 21:52 - 21:59

For years this happened and those children became known as the stolen generations.

- 22:00 - 22:20

Our children were denied love and experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and this left very deep, very complex and very real wounds, leaving scars that are still being felt personally, socially, spiritually, and collectively.

- 22:21 - 22:39

In the time when our story started, we were able to parent in the cultural way that has seen our families survive and thrive for generations, our people were strong and our culture flowed and healed us in times of hurt.

- 22:40 - 23:07

But since the trauma of colonization and the stolen generations, we have not been able to heal in the same way. And we have unknowingly passed this trauma onto our children through sharing our sad stories and having them witness and experience our pain. This is

known as intergenerational trauma and we see symptoms today in broken relationships, disconnected families, violence, suicide and drug and alcohol abuse.

• 23:07 - 23:41

But this is not where our story ends. We still have strong minds and hearts and we still know who we were and where we belong. By creating safe and strong communities together, supporting our families to be free from pain returning to our culture and building a strength of identity, we can stop the cycle of trauma and bring about positive intergenerational change so that we can continue to thrive for the next 60,000 years.

• 23:41 - 23:44

There are simple things that we can all do to help.

• 23:44 - 23:49

Heal our trauma. Visit healingfoundation.org.au to find out more.

• 23:55 - 24:21

Let's just have a brief break from my speaking and hear from some of you. I'm, I'm thinking, some of you might be thinking about your work in early childhood and how having a greater understanding of intergenerational trauma informs the work that you do or ways that you might be able to engage with families through your services.

• 24:27 - 24:30

Feel free to pop something in the chat.

• 24:33 - 24:35

Does anyone wanna say anything at the moment?

• 24:42 - 24:44

Come on guys. Don't be scared.

• 24:44 - 24:45

They're a quiet group.

• 24:46 - 24:48

Yeah, they're not normally this quiet.

• 24:49 - 25:25

I know when I first started out, as a teacher early in my career, one of the things that I learned very early on was the importance of relationships. When I was working with,

Aboriginal committees in the Northern Territory and for the families to know me and trust me and to be able to feel that their children were safe and were happy when they came to school was paramount for me to be able to, move to that next step of teaching. So that's one example. What about you?

- 25:25 – 25:26

A you might have an example.

- 25:31 – 26:04

I'm big on just truth telling, making sure that people understand the true history and, and the impact that that has on people today. Some people might watch that video just shown think, you know, stolen generations with things that happened a hundred years ago, but it actually happened to the elders in our community and people my age and myself rather than, and that can be a shock for some people, understanding the recency of how, as I said, how recent this these issues are.

- 26:05 – 26:20

And because it's much more recent that trauma's been as, as it showed in the video, has been put onto our kids and our grandkids who are still in that system now today. Yeah. So, this is about telling.

- 26:20 – 26:20

Yeah.

- 26:21 – 26:21

Yep.

- 26:26 – 26:56

One of the things I've heard colleagues at VACCA talk to me about, in terms of their own parenting is feeling, judged, having that feeling of I wonder if my child's lunchbox will be checked today. So, these feelings are still felt within the community even though, or that colleague of mine, you know, you might think, well she doesn't have to worry about that.

- 26:56 – 27:07

She actually feels that she still carries that because that was a fear that her parents had when she was growing up.

- 27:08 – 27:38

Hi, I'm Sarah, I'm actually president of AGECS, so thank you for today. It's lovely. It's just great the video and the sessions are helping educators understand it's okay to ask the

questions and that we don't always get it right and that there's so much learning. I mean, one of the greatest things I've learned from AJ is to do your acknowledgement from the heart, like, it's not always gonna sound perfect.

• 27:38 - 28:12

I'm loving learning that sometimes you have to ask and as an educator, I'm passionate about family centred practice and I think that applies to every family when they come in. Every family needs to feel welcome and not judged about what's in a lunchbox. And to have the conversation with them and say, you know, like how do they want to be addressed, their culture and what part would they like to play?

• 28:16 - 28:31

As a, as a non-indigenous person, it's a learning journey, isn't it? And it's so true to ask the questions and that's great AJ that you are encouraging your colleagues through AGECS to do that.

• 28:33 - 29:07

Yeah, I always say no question is a stupid question to ask. It would rather have these conversations here in this forum where people can learn rather than not sort of mess it up in community. But, and Kathy you'll agree with me that you know, the majority of Aboriginal people, we love sharing our culture. If we're asked respectfully if people are willing to listen and we don't get judged on what we actually do, say.

• 29:10 - 29:16

That's right. That's so true. Any other comments or thoughts?

• 29:23 - 29:30

Can I ask you a question? Do you have the statistics at the moment about how many Aboriginal kids are currently in care?

• 29:33 - 29:36

I don't have them off the top of my head, but I can certainly get those for you.

• 29:37 - 29:37

Yeah.

• 29:38 - 29:38

Yeah.

• 29:38 – 29:41

That'd that would be interesting to know.

• 29:41 – 30:11

Yeah. I know about this time last year VACCA was supporting approximately 400 children living in out of home care. I believe those numbers have gone up for us as an organization. But there are many other organizations that work with child protection with children in out of home care. There are aboriginal children in non-aboriginal community service organizations we will be supporting.

• 30:11 – 30:42

I had a look on your social media page. Is that available anywhere to share? I just think it's such a, isn't it beautiful? Yeah, it's a really heartfelt and very reader and user friendly and I wondered whether that's available anywhere. It is, you see the URL there.

• 30:42 – 31:00

It's on the healing Foundation website. Yes. Gotcha. Even if you just put healing foundation.org au browser. I will do. I just wanted to also check that it's okay to do that. Of course. It's a great, it's a great video, isn't it?

• 31:03 – 31:11

Okay, I might keep going and no other comments or questions? I think there are some messages in the chat. AJ, can you see those?

• 31:12 – 31:15

They're mainly people just saying how brilliant the movie is.

• 31:16 – 31:17

Oh, good.

• 31:17 – 31:27

Shared the movie with their pre-service teachers at the university. Yeah. it's reassuring that trauma can, can heal and we are all part of that part of the healing.

• 31:28 – 31:29

Yeah.

• 31:29 – 32:00

I've used the video within the primary and ece pre-service teachers. There is just a lot who won't get it. Right. We have them learn an acknowledgement. So, it isn't tokenistic in share books. There are case studies that speak to illustrate success, shadowing people, how this seems simplistic and certainly needs contextual cautions? I just wonder? Yeah, that's a good question.

• 32:01 - 32:33

I think it's a great question. I failed to mention at the start too, so I've been at VACCA since the end of January, so I'm still very much learning about the organization. But one of the things that we've been doing is working with the lookout centers who support kids in out of home care through their education journey. And we've started to document some PACE studies to use those as a basis to build workforce capacity within, within our organization. We have started to document some case studies.

• 32:33 - 32:53

I'm not aware of case studies, external to our organization or how they might even be shared, but it's a really good question. I think case studies really give us those real-life examples, and lived experience of professionals too. I think it's very powerful to share such experiences.

• 32:55 - 33:41

Maybe that's something through AGECS. You could, you know, a sharing of practice forum around this topic. That could be great. So, I just wanna talk to you a little bit about, a relatively new framework that's being implemented across our organization. It's called Cultural Therapeutic Ways and it's really important because it guides our way of working across the organization. It brings together theories of self-determination and trauma with culture to outline individual families so that they can understand what to expect from our organization, but also for our staff to know what to expect when working for VACCA

• 33:41 - 34:13

So, it's like I guess a guiding sort of statement that will sit across all of our programs and services at VACCA. The image is the Possum Skin cloak, which was designed by, Emma Balo, one of our staff members who's also an artist and represents, the wrapping around kind of effective services to support families and communities together. The Possum skin cloak is known as Ying, which is a Weber Weber word for this way.

• 34:15 - 34:24

And at the moment we have a team at Z who are working with all of our divisions and our services and programs to gradually implement this across our service.

• 34:31 – 35:04

I'm just gonna touch on three, government policies or strategies that underpin the work that we do, especially at VACCA in the education space, which I'm gonna talk to you about in a moment. The first one is the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy. Many of you may have already seen this document, but just in case you haven't, it's a really great document. I think if you just wanna get your head around some of the things that are happening in early childhood for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

• 35:05 – 35:30

It's an evidence-based framework, and it gathers together practice and stories of what works for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across Australia and aligns very closely with the outcomes and direction of the Closing the Gap initiative. It has five major goals that it focuses on, and I thought I'd just quickly read those to you because I think they'll resonate with your work.

• 35:31 – 36:04

So, the first one is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and remain strong. The second one, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to thrive in their early years. Number three, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are supported to establish and maintain strong connections to culture, country, and language. Number four, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up in safe nurturing homes supported by strong families and communities.

• 36:05 – 36:50

And number five, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community communities are active partners in building a better service system. Co-design has become a big part of services that have been developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait is communities for obvious reasons. You can't create services and supports without asking he recipients of that service and support if it's going to meet their needs. The strategy aligns with achieving the national agreement on closing the gap outcomes and it supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the community control services to lead the responses to children's needs.

• 36:50 – 37:11

So, it's really about, again, about self-determination and aboriginal community organizations running these services and providing these supports to their families, which is a huge shift. AJ any comments from you on that? I think you, having worked in this space for a long time, would see that as a huge shift.

• 37:21 – 37:36

I was just saying that this strategy really highlights, you know, things like co-design, aboriginal community controlled organizations, leading service delivery. So there's a really big impetus in this space at the moment. I just asked were you aware of that as well?

• 37:36 – 37:47

Yeah, it has been, it has been a real, a changing focus and I think this is gonna be expanded upon with our new government as well

• 37:47 – 37:48

Absolutely.

• 37:48 – 38:24

With Linda Bernie in charge of indigenous affairs, who is very community orientated. Looking at closing the gap, you know, I always remind people that the government has set the next 40 years to close some of these gaps and we are starting to see small improvements already in the last two years, but it still will take another 40 years for those gaps to actually be closed.

• 38:25 – 38:30

Yeah, and I assume when you had DET present, they were able to share some data with you.

• 38:31 – 38:32

Yeah.

• 38:32 – 39:02

Yeah. That's great. Um, so our ceo, auntie Muriel, who you heard from earlier, is also the chair of SNAICC, the national voice for our children across Australia. And I'd just like to read a quote from Muriel about this strategy. Culture is not an optional extra for our children. Connection to culture is, they're right. Bringing our children up in their culture is the key to making sure they feel safe, loved, proud, in their identity, and are able to fulfill their potential.

• 39:03 – 39:19

We all know that we have that critical window for our children from conception to around age five, where the health, learning, development and identity of children can be positively influenced and move them more than any other time in their life.

• 39:24 – 40:01

So, the next really important piece of government policy is the early childhood agreement for children in out of home care VACCA are signatory to this agreement together with that long list there of other organizations, so Department of Education, health and Human Services, Early Learning Association, Australia, VAEAI and so on. And this, this agreement is really about ensuring that children in out of home care in the early childhood space by bringing all of the key players together, have better outcomes.

• 40:06 – 40:45

Participation in higher quality early childhood services, we all know makes a difference to outcomes for children's lives, especially those who are vulnerable while children in out of home care among the most vulnerable in our community, many are not accessing key early childhood services. These children are at significant risk of being more developmentally vulnerable than their peers when they start school, which can lead to poorer health and education outcomes across their life goals. To improve access to services for children in out of home care, we need to understand and address barriers to participation and engagement as signatories to the agreement.

• 40:45 – 41:21

It's our collective responsibility to show these children are given all possible supports. And I can tell you, I don't have the exact figures, but I know that, the participation rates for aboriginal children in out of home care for four year old kinder is quite high. However, for three year old kinder, it's not. So that's a space where we're really going to be doing some advocacy and also working with our case managers who work in the child protection space to ensure that children are enrolled in and receive two years of kinder before they start school.

• 41:24 – 41:52

And because you've already heard from DET and VAEAI you'll be very familiar with Marrung but I think it's really important to also highlight that, that underpins the work that we do in the education space at VACCA. And this is really about building, and improving outcomes for aboriginal children, but also, increasing knowledge in the education space for all children and young people around Aboriginal culture. So, it has that two pronged focus.

• 41:57 – 42:22

There are also a number of initiatives that support Aboriginal children. Zero to five koorie kids, shine best start, with a particular focus on aboriginal communities and also the lookout centers that are really the conduit between child protection and schools. And we,

we started to do some collaborative work with the lookout centers to support the outcomes of the partnering agreement that I just mentioned.

• 42:27 - 42:58

We have a new education strategy at VACCA and this really came out of, the last two years of covid. It really shone a light on the disadvantage and lack of access to education for children, young people in our services and programs at VACCA. So an education strategy was developed last year and in the early years, obviously that's part of the stages of education. We have a big focus on children being developmentally on track so that they start school ready.

• 42:59 - 43:15

So my role at VACCA which is a new role this year, is to oversee the implementation of this strategy from early years right through to post-school transitions. So we've got a big challenge ahead of us, lots of work, but it's a really exciting space to be working in.

• 43:20 - 43:57

We run a range of family services at VACCA and many of these services target family with children in the zero to five space. So, it's just to give you an idea that as well as specific early childhood programs, there's also other services that we're offering to support families. What seems to be happening is momentum growing in the disability space because what we're finding is a lot of aboriginal children in out of home care also have either undiagnosed or diagnosed disabilities.

• 44:05 - 44:39

So, I just wanna talk to you a little bit about koorie kids supported playgroups because I think this is one of the programs that has been delivered now for over 15 years., but it really targets that early year space. I'm sure many of you are familiar with supported playgroup, but with the VACCA koorie kids supported playgroup, they're unique because, they are obviously culturally sensitive. Families come along and there's culture embedded in all of the activities that the children and families participate in.

• 44:40 - 45:22

The playgroup facilitators are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals who are trained in early years, but also have those really important connections to the local community and to services so that families can be connected. I worked in the space of playgroups for a number of years. Supported playgroups are incredibly powerful and probably underfunded and under acknowledged vehicle to connect families from zero to three in that space where families can really go off the radar and not be connected, for

example, with maternal and child health, be connected to and enrol to participate in kindergarten.

- 45:22 - 45:27

So, they're a really, really powerful model of connection in the early year space.

- 45:29 - 45:51

Before I take questions, I'd really like to read you all a story because you're all early childhood professionals and I thought that that's something you'd love. So I'm gonna read you this story, which is called WEConnect. Oh, hopefully this will work. I think it's working. Can you see that?

- 45:56 - 45:56

No.

- 45:57 - 46:10

Oh, okay. Sorry everyone. So I might just quickly stop sharing. Maybe I can take a question if there's a question just while I get myself sorted.

- 46:12 - 46:13

Anyone got a question?

- 46:23 - 46:29

I just wanna go back to Lisa's statement. Do you know if they are actually recording success stories?

- 46:33 - 46:43

As I said, we are through some of the work we're doing in the lookout with the partnership with the lookout centers, but I can ask that question. I can ask that question of my colleagues.

- 46:44 - 46:44

Yeah.

- 46:45 - 46:49

Maybe if you can just jot that down for me, AJ so I don't forget <laugh>.

- 46:49 - 46:50

Yeah, I'll send you an email now.

• 46:52 – 47:31

So efficient. Yeah. Okay, so I'm gonna share my screen again. Um, it's probably a bit early for a bedtime story, but, we connect. So ,this, this book was written by the parents and children of Thomastown and VACCA crew kids and playgroups groups. And I think it just really sums up some of the things we've been talking about this evening. We connect with each other family to family, we connect through great memories.

• 47:33 – 48:05

Our eyes will remember our time together. We connect through creativity. We make art and laugh and share. We connect for life. We'll see each other at events. We connect through building pride. Our bup deserve to be proud in their culture. We're from all over, but we connect.

• 48:05 – 48:28

When we go back to our kids' country, they sit on the land and are calm and content and we connect to the country we live on with possum skins and local stories. We connect through knowing the symbols of our culture. This necklace is a gift when you go to another's country.

• 48:33 – 48:39

And I'd just like to acknowledge the artists and the writers who supported the families to document their story.

• 48:47 – 49:19

Weconnect was created to celebrate the importance of coming together, sharing culture, and passing this on to all Aboriginal children. We connect celebrates culture, belonging, and identity. We're from all over, but we connect . So I'm gonna stop sharing my screen and happy to open it up for a quick chat. I think we've got 10 minutes, is that right, AJ? Yep. Yep. Okay. So, any questions, any comments or questions?

• 49:19 – 49:30

Can we purchase that book? I believe so. I'll find out and get that link to AJ. It's a beautiful book, isn't it? Yeah.

• 49:30 – 49:41

And AJ, Lisa asked in the box whether some of the previous DET presentation was available. It should be on our website, but is it just for members or for everyone?

• 49:42 - 49:47

Uh, that we need to check with Alex, but every, for everybody seminar, sorry Alex.

• 49:47 - 49:54

It's for everybody. It's the reconciliation page, which is accessible to everyone. Perfect. Thank you.

• 49:54 - 49:57

So the last four have been recorded and uploaded.

• 50:02 - 50:20

I don't know if you're all familiar. There's an organization, Yarn Strong Sista, who produce and sell beautiful resources that are by Aboriginal authors. So, if you're looking for resources for early childhood centers, they have some great resources.

• 50:27 - 51:07

Any questions? Alannah, you've always got a question. Probably to more to do with just the relationship. Maybe if you could talk a little bit about the relationship between, early childhood centers and VACCA, you know, what kind of involvement you have. I'm teaching at Fed Uni now, but when I was working in early childhood centers, that would've been really helpful to have had that connection.

• 51:07 - 51:21

It was a while ago, but you know, it was, it was pretty hard and the KESOs were really struggling because they couldn't fill positions.

• 51:21 - 51:23

That's a really good question.

• 51:24 - 52:01

Yeah, it's probably just good to explain. So, you would know this, but obviously, it's good to just explain anyway. So VAEAI are the peak body for education in Victoria, whereas VACCA are a service deliverer. So we have slightly different functions and the keso statewide workforce, you know, are DET employees. And so they sit across and support all koorie children. Whereas at vaca we work primarily with the children and carers who are connected through our services, whether it's out of home care or through some of our other programs.

• 52:01 – 52:38

So we don't have that kind of broad, I guess, role across all organizations, but I think it's something that's really important for us to have conversations with the other organizations about. We're beginning to work on, a bit of a project where we're gonna map the supports that are available and I think it's important to make that awareness to, for aboriginal families, but also organizations who are trying to connect with aboriginal families like you're saying because if you don't know about those things, it's really challenging.

• 52:39 – 52:41

Yeah, yeah.

• 52:41 – 52:42

Very good. But that's a really good question.

• 52:44 – 52:44

Thank you.

• 52:45 – 53:15

I've got a question. It's Sue here. How are you folks? Hi. See, just interested in, you know, obviously we we're getting more and more children that are, you know, could be deemed as vulnerable and perhaps in out of home care. Has Covid made a really significant part in that? Or is it, you know, we'd always talk about covid. Is is that a bit of a myth, do you think? Or do you think it has affected the numbers?

• 53:16 – 53:58

Look, I I couldn't comment on that personally. I think that, but what I can comment on is I think across the board, as you would know Covid has impacted the education space, whether it's early childhood or schools. As I said, I was working in a school for the last two years and we had some families who if they were not connected already when, we moved to remote learning, they were even more disconnected. So I guess, for families who maybe don't have access to technology or the internet, you know, COVID has really impacted vulnerable families, I think, in a more profound way than families who have more resources available to them.

• 54:03 – 54:05

It's really shown up those cracks, hasn't it? It's made.

• 54:05 - 54:06

Those cracks.

• 54:07 - 54:10

You know, somebody said it's exacerbated.

• 54:10 - 54:43

The fault lines. That's right. And in fact, that's why the position that I'm in now was introduced to our organization. We didn't have anyone at our organization that was focusing, I guess strategically across the board in terms of engagement in education. And so, for VACCA as an organization, that was a big decision. They decided we actually need some resourcing to work in the education space. We need people with education, qualifications and experience who are able to work with our broader staff to ensure those connections are made.

• 54:44 - 55:14

As an example, at the moment we're working with, case managers who are engaging through the lookout centers. So, for example, they could be contacted by an early childhood learning advisor from the Lookout Center to explore whether or not children are enrolled at kindergarten, for example. And for our case managers, not only are they supporting carers who feel overwhelmed by the system and how do you know what, how, how they have or have not engaged.

• 55:14 - 55:36

Our case managers also can feel quite overwhelmed in that space as well. So even the professionals supporting the carers, it's really challenging. So, we are doing some work with our case managers, a bit of 101 kind of education of what they need to know in their roles to, to support and advocate for children and young people. Yeah.

• 55:40 - 55:42

Any other questions or thoughts?

• 55:49 - 55:51

Everyone probably wants to go and have their dinner. <laugh>.

• 55:52 - 55:59

Any, final comments? Catherine, anything, any final statement you want people to leave with tonight?

• 56:01 – 56:31

Oh, I haven't prepared a final statement, but I think it's been great to talk to all this evening. I think that, you know, for myself as a non-indigenous educator throughout my career, it's always been about, like AJ said, ask the questions, educate yourself, find out where to find out more, read some of those policies that I've sent through to you and links to websites. There's really valuable information there that I think will help you in your work.

• 56:31 – 56:44

I wish I could learn more, a bit more about your work and what you're doing and if you're engaging with Aboriginal families, but, we haven't got time for that this evening that it's been great to be here. And thank you AJ

• 56:45 – 56:53

Thank you, Catherine. Can everyone please give Catherine an applause, even though she may not be able to hear it.

• 56:53 – 56:54

Thank you.

• 56:55 – 57:01

On some thank yous coming up on the screen. Catherine, thank you.

• 57:01 – 57:04

I can see the chat now. So that's lovely. Thanks everyone.

• 57:05 – 57:37

Once you drop your presentation, you can see everything. Once again everyone, I want to thank everyone for tuning into these seminars. It's really important that we spread the word through the industry that these workshops are so important to give people an idea of the issues that Aboriginal families are actually facing. I love how someone said, I think it was one of the other presentations, we don't enrol students, we enrol families.

• 57:38 – 58:09

And it's so important to have a good understanding of what an Aboriginal family is actually experiencing. This is the first generation of Aboriginal kids that are getting to year 12. 54% of the Aboriginal populations under the age of 25. That's things we've talked about in the previous workshops. It is so important that we start making changes in order to get early childhood right

• 58:09 – 58:55

I think Heather Kennedy, at the launch of the wrap, she said how if we can make change, the best place we can start making changes in early childhood? You know, because if we can make the change better, then the changes will hopefully go into primary school and then into high school and then into the university courses. And if we're looking at closing the gap, as I said, it's gonna take 40 years. If those young people that you are actually guiding and moulding and teaching aboriginal's perspectives and ways of looking at Aboriginal people in different ways, they're gonna take that through the next 40 years to the jobs and the professions that they're gonna end up being in as well.

• 58:56 – 59:04

So, we do play an important role. I want to again, thank everyone for tuning in.

• 59:04 – 59:38

Our next guest speaker next month is Nicole Finlay from Reconciliation Victoria, who is coming in and talking. And the one in September is GMAR, the grandmothers against removal, that are gonna be talking about keeping kids safe and in their homes. So once again, guys, I wanna say thank you for tuning in. Please look after yourself, look after your families, go have your dinner, have a glass of wine, do whatever it is you need to relax and we'll see you again next month.

• 59:39 – 59:41

See you guys. Thank you for joining us.