

Reconciliation Seminar 9: Child Protection and Grandmothers Against Removal

Transcript from the Reconciliation Series 1 2022

• 0:01 - 0:32

Welcome guys. Can you believe we're up to seminar nine already. Just before I do start, I just want to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land that I'm currently on. I'm here in Baldwin, Kew on the land of the Wurundjeri people. I pay respect to the Elders past, present and emerging. And I extend that to the land that you are currently on as well. I pay respect to Elders past and present, but I'd also like to extend that to the lands, where you may have grown up on.

• 0:32 - 0:57

That could be somewhere completely different than where you are right now. And on behalf of AGECS, AGECS is located on the land of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people, and we pay respect to their Elders past and present. Tonight we've actually got Aunty Reio coming in talking about the Grandmothers Against Removal.

• 0:57 - 1:32

We knew she was coming in on her iPad, but has been having a lot of trouble, logging in due to technical issues that we've all kind of face at the moment. So she's rushing home to try to get on by seven, which is good because my first little bit of the presentation is a little bit about putting some things, a little bit of a context for you. I'll introduce when she comes on as well, but Aunty Reio is a Waka Waka Bundjalung Elder and she's also. Oh, here, she is.

• 1:43 - 2:17

Hey. Coming in with Tash. So I'm just going to put some things in context before we throw over to Hello. Hello. We can hear you. Yeah, we can hear you. Can you hear us? Yes. Okay. Now can you see us <laugh>? See you too. We're going to just talk a little bit about child protection in general, and then we're going to throw over to you guys in about 10 minutes or so.

• 2:17 - 2:35

Cool. Yep, that's fine. So, it could be a little bit of a trigger warning through this, workshop. We are talking about kids in care. We are talking about high numbers of Aboriginal kids that still remain in child protection.

• 2:37 – 3:12

Sorry, I didn't realize that. You can see my face so closely. You know, as a kid myself that was in care. Could you talk up a bit please, AJ? I'm talking as loud as I can. Because I can't hear, let me see if I can put it on the car. Okay. Just mute them for a second.

• 3:13 – 3:46

So yeah, just a bit of a trigger warning. Those who don't know me my name's AJ Williams and I'm moderating this event tonight. I'm a Wiradjuri man from Horsham and Wotjobaluk from Horsham. So, I just want to put a couple of things just in a bit big perspective. Every state and territory actually is responsible for statutory child protection. In Victoria, the department is at the mument now the Department of Fairness, Families and Housing. If you are talking to community, they will refer to it through a number of different names.

• 3:46 – 3:56

Their previous acronyms such as D H H S, which was the Department of Housing and Human Services, DHS, and still a growing up when I was a kid, it was C S B.

• 3:59 – 4:34

So, couple of things to just, again, put in a bit of a context a little bit about Australia's spending. That in 2020-2021, the national recurrence spending on child protection and out of home care was about 6.2 billion. That was an increase spending over the past five years. And each, each year there's been about 385 million more spent on kids in out of home care.

• 4:34 – 5:10

That's actually, when you look at that, it's quite a lot of money that's actually been spent. In 2021 two, there was more than 178,800 children supported by state and territory child protection. And this is in general, this is both indigenous and non-indigenous kids. From that, figures, we know that there was 531,900 notifications on about 293 600 children and 68,000 substantiation on about 49,7000 kids.

• 5:11 – 5:42

What we do know is that, on June the 30th, 2021, there was 46,200 children in out of home care. When you look at some of those numbers, they are quite, quite large. If we're looking at it. A little bit on the indigenous data, we know that in 2020 to 2021 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 10 times more likely to be removed from their families compared to non-indigenous children.

• 5:43 – 6:04

And 14,600 indigenous children were a subject of a substantiation. With emotional abuse being about 48% of all, substantiations followed by neglect of 31%. This actually equals to about one in 23 Aboriginal children with a substantiation.

• 6:07 – 6:51

As of June 30, sorry, 2021, 24,200 indigenous children are in a care and protection order. And of the 69%, which is around 16,700 grow up in guardianship or custody orders, which is quite a lot, it's like, well, 70%. One in 17 indigenous children around 19,500 were in out-of-home care, almost two thirds of whom were living with relatives, kin or other indigenous carers, and 5,400 children who were reunified in 2021, nearly one sorry, one out of three were indigenous, which is only about a third of it. What else do we know? This is for Victoria that the number of, of numbers and proportion of children by Aboriginal status out of, yeah. So you can actually see here that, Aboriginal kids made up 27%.

• 7:37 – 8:10

So we've got the one thousand one hundred seventy eight thousand eight hundred kids, 531,900 notifications on 68,000 Substantiations on 49,700 kids. That 46,200 children were in out of home care.

• 8:13 – 8:28

That, 1000, I'm sorry, 14,600 indigenous children were a subject of substantiation, emotional abuse being 48%, followed by neglect that Aboriginal kids are 10 times more likely to be removed from their families.

• 8:30 – 9:00

And this is of June, 2021, I said, of guardianship orders and custody orders, about 70% of our kids are on guardianship and custody orders. The majority of non-indigenous kids are actually on what they call a supervision order. But one out of 17 indigenous children were in out-of-home care. Two, two thirds are living with a relative and 5,400 children were reunified. And that's only 1.3. It's one out of three. So that 31% were indigenous.

• 9:00 – 9:16

If you're looking at the Victorian data, children on protection orders. 27% of all kids are Aboriginal kids, which again, is nearly a third.

• 9:18 – 10:10

If you're looking at, investigations, we are looking at, from as of June 31st, 13.2%, identified as being Aboriginal. And the number of proportion of children by Aboriginal status, here, and this is for children in care was 2,529 or nearly 30%, which is about a third of the kids in care are currently Aboriginal. We do know that, yeah, the ABC reported, earlier this year that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Victoria are 16 times more likely to be removed from their families by child protection services, non-indigenous kids, which is higher than the national average.

• 10:13 – 10:45

Muriel Bamblett CEO of VACCA actually quoted this saying: “I think as a nation we should be really sort of shocked and horrified by the current statistics of Aboriginal kids currently in care”. Now, we do know that when kids go into the child protection system, that anyone, any concerned party can actually, report suspicion of child abuse and neglect.

• 10:45 – 11:23

Whether you're a community member, a professional, some children ring up themselves to talk a bit about what's been happening, parents and other relatives. Now, with the statistics around, child protection, there is a child protection process, and you guys will get a copy of this as well. So I'm just going to go through it really quickly. But there's, there's a report obviously, to the state and territory, and if there's a report of concerns of welfare and a child. It goes to intake, every one of the ones in coloured is the, where the stats come from.

• 11:23 – 12:07

So the reports on the welfare don't get reported, but the child protection notifications do. So then if there's a notification, there's an investigation and it's either substantiated or not substantiated, or it's not investigated, and those are the ones that the statistics of what actually gets, publicized. They're the, they're the actual, the ones in colour are where the statistics actually come from. If the child is safe, yes, there's provision of case management and referrals is required, and if the child is safe, the case is often closed, and then they exit the system straight away.

• 12:07 – 12:28

If, there's an investigation and it might choose that they're not investigated, it will go to secondary supports. There might be an investigation and it's not substantiated. Now it's not substantiated does not mean it doesn't, it didn't happen. It means there's just not enough evidence to actually make a ruling there.

• 12:28 – 13:07

Yes, this abuse did occur. If there's a yes, again, if there's a, sorry, if there's a child is safe, no, then they'll actually go to care and protection order with case management, which might result in out-of-home care or other placement options and then from these placement options, they'll actually make a decision whether the kid's permanently placed and if the child, safe, they might be reunified. And hopefully with the option of exiting the system, we don't really want our kids in the child protection system long term. Well that's just a little bit of an over view.

• 13:07 – 13:27

I just wanted to provide you with a little bit of a child protection process there. And just to highlight that when we are talking about the statistics, they're actually coming from notifications, investigations, substantiation, care and Protection out of home reunification and placements. That's where they kind of fit.

• 13:27 - 14:06

Does that make sense? Yeah. I just wanted to jump over to Youth Justice as well, because a lot of kids in care, especially if they're put into a group home setting, often end up in juvenile justice as well when they're older. And I just wanted to show you that from 2021, that 14% of all children and young people involved in, in Youth Justice identify as being Aboriginal. 80% were male, 20% are female, 30% are 18 years or older, 66% are aged 14 to 17, 4% are aged 10 to 13.

• 14:07 - 14:42

That, out of all the cases, 37 were in Metro and 63 are in regional. A little bit of a perspective, but being in care, that there are some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement principles, and I'm going to ask Aunty Reio and Tash to talk a little bit about what doesn't work really well in the system. But the five core elements of the Aboriginal Torres Child Placement Principal is around prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection.

• 14:42 - 14:55

And it should be worked on a continuum, but we do see a lot of loopholes, in each one of those, areas that are actually causing our kids to actually stay in care more often.

• 14:58 - 15:38

Now, some of the reasons for investigations out of home care and why kids still remain at a high rate, that they're less likely to access early childhood education, high rates of socio and economic disadvantage are poverty, overcrowded housing, family violence situations, the institutional racism, the lack of involvement in decision making, the lack of appropriate family members seen as carers, insufficient home visits, the over reporting, and lot more substantiations on greater levels compared to non-indigenous kids, material disadvantage, less likely to be reunified, deficiencies in the provision of cultural care, despite there being a compulsory cultural plan that needs to be designed for every kid. (Aboriginal kid who's out in care, sorry) and very inconsistent monitoring of the actual principles themselves.

• 16:04 - 16:47

So we do know that child protection themselves have admitted that the system isn't working a hundred percent. VACCA, the Victorian Aboriginal childcare that we spoke, spoke to a number of sessions ago, they admitted themselves too that the system isn't working really, really effective. But there is a group of people who are the, oops, I just

wanted to say that by large, uh, indigenous children and young people in the general population perform worse on certain educational, psychological and social measures in comparison to non-indigenous children and young people.

• 16:47 – 17:13

And this also appears to be the case for those involved in foster care systems to the impact on kids. But we also need to realize that kids in care, actually, can you see this at all coming up? No white screen again. Oh, I don't know what's happening. I'm going, can you see that? There we go.

• 17:13 – 17:52

We do know the impact that care has on indigenous kids is a loss of identity, loss of family contact, especially through parents, siblings, grandparents, loss of contact with country, loss of cultural knowledge and experiences, self-esteem and self-image issues, and increase in self-harming behaviour. In group home settings, mixing with individuals with criminal records, participating in criminal activities for acceptance, trying to balance being in two worlds, often questioning of identity and self.

• 17:53 – 18:31

They're less likely to complete year 10 and year 12, and they're more likely to be a younger parent themselves. So there are a group of people, and I'm so happy that they've come on tonight to actually, talk and I'm so glad to be part of GMAR myself. But we've got Aunty Reio and Tash, which is right here that's going to actually talk to you a little bit more about what GMAR actually does to try to help kids and families, not be in the child protection system for as long as they possibly can.

• 18:32 – 18:38

So Aunty Reio, how are you now?

• 18:43 – 19:16

AJ: So, hey, Reio, can you tell us how GMAR was formed?

Aunty Reio: Well, unfortunately, GMAR was formed many years ago.

• 19:16 – 19:47

I, reckon since colonization, but we now got a name, if this is something that I've been doing for many, many years. And I'm, I was nearly, and you know, a product of the stolen generation. Mum and Dad kept us out in the bush. But, the thing that I've been doing has now got a name called, GMAR, which is Grandmothers Against Removal. And we founded that in, 2018.

• 19:47 – 19:55

We had, Aunty Hazel come down from Sydney, and that's a New South Wales, Grandmothers Against Removal.

• 19:55 - 20:27

So we, we do more than, ones in New South Wales where they, they sort of lobby and, and, and go to the government and all that, which we want to do later on. But we do the practical things like supervise access. We ensure we wanna ensure that parents and children get their access with their parents. We want to ensure that, we work alongside the department to, look at the culture and plan for the child if they're in out of home care, if they're, you know with non-Aboriginal families.

• 20:28 - 20:47

We do a lot of things like we have support and monitoring as, as grandparents do. So we are basically, I guess you can see us as being the village that raised a child because we'll go in and help and that, that dad or that family or that grandmother.

• 20:48 - 21:18

But the more we help the family, not just the child. Well, the family's our client per se, not just the child. And we find it amazing that when we go to court, the departments they're trying to keep children away from their family. And, you know, unfortunately back is sitting with them and we're saying, well, you know, what, what, what are you doing?

• 21:18 - 22:01

And they say, well, the child is our, is our client. And I said, well, last time I seen a child, I had parents, and if we are going to endorse this as an Aboriginal, and I say we when I talk about VACCA because they've got some awesome programs. But again, it's that, I guess big white 'bwana' mentality of saying, well, you know, we have to ensure that we run the case from your perspective, which is VACCA's got all these programs, but you can't get into those programs without being referred by the Department.

• 22:01 - 22:37

So where's the, self-determination in that? So that's, and again, that's where the system breaks down. So, you know, GMAR does a lot of things, but it's on a grassroot level. You know, we do, we don't sort of, I don't know how to say it. We just, it's very, we're very passionate, you know, we're very, we do don't want this to happen to our mob. And yet when we go in and we help the families, and, you know, six times out of 10 families, children are returned and reunited.

• 22:38 - 22:57

That's saying something, you know, so when, when we look at a case, we don't, we don't look at the case and say, okay, we are gonna dismiss the concerns. We actually look at

the concerns and we say, all right, well what can we do to support this family so that you don't have concerns?

• 22:57 – 23:31

Which in actual fact, we're acknowledging the fact that we don't play a role in the care of our community children. The department doesn't. How does that happen? Every time something happens, I say, alright, who was the Aboriginal rep when you walked into that family's home and took the children with police? Where was VACCA? Where was Lakidjeka? Oh, we don't have to tell 'em. I said, well, is that, is it, you know, and this is what we do. We do, we talk in a layman's terminology.

• 23:32 – 23:51

We go to court. Even if we just go to court and sit there and hold mum and dad's hand and say, we are here for you. That helps. But that's, that's what we do. We have no money. We just go and get train, trams and buses to court to help the families.

• 23:53 – 24:26

But those, those statistics you're talking about, AJ is so alarming. And I'm wondering, and I'm talking as an angry woman here, an angry grandmother, an angry Aboriginal community member as to what are and am I asking the right question? What are our black politicians doing? You know, they're all worried about the earth and all that. Well, why worry about the earth if our children are not gonna be around? That's, and that's, that's how we put it in simple terms.

• 24:26 – 24:49

And that's how we, you know, we wanna know why, why is, our children are being kept away from.. Even though the parents are jumping through the hoops, they're complying with a lot of stuff and we see some rogue, and I'm telling you, rogue workers in the department, even to say so much as, oh, we don't have listening to you, you are not even incorporated.

• 24:49 – 25:21

I go, but we're the Aboriginal community. We support people and we wanna work collaboratively with you. So, you know, it's when we say, have you done the child getting sibling access? Is a child getting access with mum and dad, all of that. Sometimes in some bad cases parents are not having access. We are wondering why. The Department said, well, he was sick out there.

• 25:21 – 25:46

I said, well, does the mum and dad have her to see your medical certificate? Now we can ask this if the child is only on an interim accommodation order, you know, if the child was on another order where the department ordered to the secretary, mum and dad may not,

you know, have truly to the, to the, medical certificate, but all of that because our mob dunno how to talk.

• 25:53 – 26:24

AJ: What would you, in your experience, why do you think there are more Aboriginal kids in care?

Aunty Reio: Racism! Have, look at that, haven't look at it, we're the three percenters and we're overrepresented.

• 26:24 – 26:42

And when we go to court, we can't, you gotta have money to even say, I wanna appeal that decision because, legal aid is not, you can't afford legal aid to appeal an order to vary, an order to oppose an order. You actually gotta pay.

• 26:42 – 26:59

The lawyer's money if you wanna do all those things. So in actual fact, it looks like the parent doesn't wanna fight for the child, but the fight's already done. You know, we are always start from the.... "That also comes down to,...

• 27:05 – 27:37

I'm also aware that it also comes down to privilege as well. Like a lot of our people didn't have the, the privilege of generational wealth and, you know, stuff like that. So we were born into, you know, poverty and stuff like that. So therefore, we was always kept out and therefore, that's why a lot of our children are being taken as well because of the poverty line and all that stuff.

• 27:37 – 28:08

And that's what we wanna do as GMAR to work with the family, not just the kid, but we can work with the family to let them know that the different resources that are out there let them know that they do have support. And I wanna just let you know, as a witness to a lot of work that my mum does, is a lot of the time it's just having mum there as a voice, as a support person to speak their terms to our families.

• 28:08 – 28:51

Cuz a lot of our families don't even understand the, the lingo and all that stuff that is spoken in both courtroom and build a jargon and all that. Whereas we as GMAR, we, we understand a lot of that from our own experiences. So we are there to support the families and to help them understand what's really going on and what's the, what's, you know, get read in between the lines and stuff. And a lot of the time also, we speak up on behalf of the family to the authority figures, to support the family and to let them know that they, the family, they're not just Jackie Jackson or they're not just someone out of your university case study books.

• 28:51 - 29:00

You know, this is real life here. This is you, you know, you really play in monopoly with people's families, you know, so that's what we do as well.

• 29:00 - 29:31

We also advocate on that personal side for families too. And that's, and that's what a lot of our families don't have. They don't have somebody who can talk on their behalf who's strong enough, like my mother to stand up against these politicians and their lawyers and judges and everything and tell them straight up and true honesty what's what. And that's why their kids are getting taken. Cause they don't know how to speak for themselves. They don't know how to stand up and you know, like a lot of them don't even know their rights.

• 29:31 - 29:40

A lot of our clients, you know. So that's a very big part of what GMAR does as well, as well as advocating, you know, behind the scenes.

• 29:41 - 30:19

Business stuff with the politics and all that. And you guys are not funded? We know that. How paid anything? No. How, how many GMAR's are there? Exactly? Like how many were we talking about? How many people are working on the ground to actually help families? We have eight, we have eight across Victoria. So there's one in Mildura, one, one in, Echuca, one in Warragul, Bairnsdale, there's, oh three down here, right?

• 30:19 - 30:51

Yeah, yeah. In the metro. But you know, COVID gave us a new way of working and, um, except for me, because I used to put my PPEs on you know, don fully and go and sit down and actually ensure, that parents have supervised visits with their children or monitored visits with their children. So that, and that's only because I have background with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service. I'm a, Aboriginal health practitioner.

• 30:52 - 31:34

So, and that's what I bring to GMAR is the, the medical things and all that. It's so disheartening. And, and I'm not silly. I know there's times when children do need to be removed and mum and dad looked at and say, look, let's have a reprieve. Let's see what we can do in the meantime. But when we see grandparents regardless, that non suitable because of a, something happened, didn't have Working With Children Check, and then they're not getting their work with children because they had a crime when they were 14, they're 60 now, but they still bring that up, which is just non-practical.

• 31:34 - 31:50

How, I mean, I believe this, this world has gone mad since mandatory reporting. That's, that's when the report started going in and people just didn't know what to do. They get the bang, bang, bang, let's pick, let's take the Aboriginals.

• 31:51 – 32:26

You know? That's, that's how it seems. And it's, it's since mandatory reporting, I, I believe for you that yeah, okay, if we can help families stay together, let's do it. And it's working. We've seen, we've seen it happen. Then we see some families that sort of can't, they've actually said they can't control, but we've ensured that. So the children go to family, not to non-Aboriginal family where they lose their culture. I'm, I'm every probably two cases of, we, I ask the department, have they had sibling access?

• 32:26 – 32:53

Have they had family, mum and dad have access? Do you have a cultural, cultural care plan? You know, have you had, have these family been afforded an AFLDM? Some been in the system for four years and still the department didn't say, oh, you know, let's have an AFLDM, which is an Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making Meeting and family sit down and talk.

• 32:53 – 33:31

And then, you know, I mean, as I'm, as I'm saying that, okay, there is a place for child protection if we know that they're actually, you know, protecting our children, but more, more, more cases than a lot, we wonder why they're saying they're protecting our children because they're not, they're not. Did not, our children are suffering emotionally, emotional trauma on the fact that they're saying, oh, it doesn't have to be substantiated.

• 33:31 – 34:02

It's as if it's there. And you, you said it once before, AJ, if there's a, like, and, and I believe this, this applies to every child in the world. When a child is taken, that order, he was removed because he is likely to, or he may be physically assaulted, may be sexually assaulted, may suffer medical neglect. Now that's the judge's grandchild.

• 34:02 – 34:03

That's the judge's son.

• 34:03 – 34:55

That's, that's anybody's child. But bang, they come on down hard with that. And, and the judicial system needs to stop seeing that and have that colonial way of thinking that the right way is the right way. You know? And I'm not going to apologize to anybody about how I talk because that's how it's, that's how it is. And it, because I'm proof that when GMAR goes in and works alongside of VACCA and the Department, that child returns home, you

know, before 2018, 4 children was taken off their parent, their mother, because they accused her of taking her children to witness a murder.

• 34:55 – 35:22

Now, until we came right into it, and we go, at the end of the day, I had to say to the judge, oh, your honour, I, I, you know, I fully believe that this mother didn't get her kids wrapped up in a blanket and say, come on, I'll show you how many murders, many the child, the children were being protected and, and unfortunately a man was killed when they, when they don't look at it like that and they take the children off the mother, you know that that's wrong.

• 35:23 – 36:13

That's, that's so alarming. And this is why I believe all these, the high higher rate of children is because of they don't board worker an emphatic worker. You know? Nine times out of 10 you'll see the department looking after the carers, but not the parents. Yeah. You know, if the, if the parents have oh, a house or a car like they do, and we know we've witnessed that they do give care of houses and cars to have children, why can't they afford that for the, for the parents and support the parents to keep their children, you know, in that family unit to keep them with their mum and dad, with their nan and things like that.

• 36:14 – 36:38

And, and that's where we come from. That's, and it's so, so disheartening. I'm, I get tired, but....., We've had the conversation a few times ourselves where, I'm not sure I want to put it out there for, cause this has been recorded as well, is that the first option is to always place the kid with an Aboriginal family member.

• 36:39 – 37:11

The problem is, is that the department doesn't deem many Aboriginal family members as appropriate because historically grandma lost her kids to the child protection system, which means that she's often ruled out as being a carer. The children that have been in foster care themselves are often sometimes ruled out because the, the case workers look at and go, well, what sort of parent are you? Because you haven't had a great parenting yourself.

• 37:12 – 37:38

We've had young men that have been, and women that have been through the juvenile justice system that get out of those systems, but clean themselves up. And when their brother or sisters having trouble put their hands up and go, Hey, I can look after my kids. But they get ruled out because of their previous criminal record. That's right. That's right. And very soon that there is no family, Aboriginal family member deemed appropriate enough.

• 37:41 – 38:18

You wonder, you wonder how, how can these, the system, the, the judges, the judges, how can they sit there and make, make, um, recommendations or orders about this? Do they really believe that, um, the high rate of Aboriginal children taken is because all Aboriginal parents are bad parents? You know, when, when, these investigations done, we had one said, oh look, we're not gonna go for a, family reunification order.

• 38:18 - 38:39

We are gonna go for a security order. I said, well, why are you doing that? Mum and dad jumped through all the hoops and they go, oh, well there's too much of a risk. I said, well, how do you know there's a risk? You know, there's, there's, that's, that applies to everybody. That that kind of thing applies to everybody. You know, I mean, even my grandchildren, they're at risk of me medically neglecting them.

• 38:39 - 39:22

They're at risk of me not feeding them. You know? So that's, that's your children, that's these other people's children, you know, everybody is at risk or may suffer, and yet they're coming down hard on, the Aboriginal community. No. And, and that's all around Australia, I dunno why. Yeah. Well, we have seen the research come through on case studies they've done between Aboriginal and non-indigenous, you know, especially in the juvenile justice setting where, a young Aboriginal boy will be charged with the same crime as a non-indigenous kid, but the non-indigenous kid gets a warning and the Aboriginal kid gets charged.

• 39:23 - 39:48

And it's fair to say that's racism. That's absolute racism. If you go and look at the the human rights charter, you know, that is absolute racism. Even just it being, we are the 3% of the population, and yet we're the high rate incarcerated, homeless and removed, you know?

• 39:48 - 40:20

Yeah. That's, that's absolute racism. Um, we're, we're, we're gonna hopefully chase that up, but look, we're, we're grandmothers. We, we go in and we hold people, and if somebody wants to advocate for us, take it up to the next level to the, government or whatever, because I'm not gonna wait for our black politicians to do anything. But they're too busy chasing rainbow base really? When, when the, I never ever heard any of them talk about our children that are being re.. the high rate of children being removed.

• 40:20 - 41:00

I've never heard 'em talk about it, you know, so you wanna get on, get on the TV and all that and talk about this and talk about that. I've never heard talk about, oh, let's try and lower that rate. Let's find out why that rate is so high. You know, are all Aboriginal parents, alcoholics and drug affected? Are all families, domestic violence perpetrators? Well, I can

say no. Yeah. As I know our clients, no, I, I believe that a lot of, if we have domestic violence perpetrator in our community, there's a lot more in the non-Aboriginal community, you know, because of our population.

• 41:03 - 41:19

So, you know, we, we, we need to address that. We've got about 10 minutes. I, sorry. That's alright. I'm gonna ask anybody if they've got any questions for you. Has anyone got any questions for Aunty Reio at this stage?

• 41:25 - 41:57

Who is that? Sue? Is it Sue? Who do we have here? Marie Wiggins and Tess Beers. Can you hear me darling? Tess, has anyone got any questions at all? Aunty Reio? Who is that? Alana? Yeah, go. Hi, Aunty Reio. Thank you. How are ya? Oh, I'm good.

• 41:57 - 42:36

Look, thanks so much. I'm, I'm just, um, pretty overwhelmed with what you've been saying, but with the little bit, I used to be a court support worker for women of domestic violence years ago, and the system, I'm, you know, it's very easy to say, well, the system wouldn't do that. The system looks after it. And unless you kind of see what goes on, and I've seen nothing like what you are talking about, but little elements of that, that are really disturbing because it's just this big system, one size fits all, but, and things go under the radar.

• 42:38 - 43:18

My question is, besides a donation, obviously, what can we do as early childhood professionals? Have you got any thoughts on what we can do as particularly like, I'm non-indigenous and Yeah, I think early childhood professionals should, I guess be decolonizing the way they thinking that children should be brought up, you know, respect the Aboriginal culture and not think that one size fits all, or, or the white way is the right way.

• 43:18 - 43:50

Because that's, we are finding that's, that's slamming our families. And if we talk about culture, the screws get tighter on our families that are, are removed. But, yeah, it's, it's just have a, have a understanding that, you know, some of these things are not substantiated when our children are taken. yeah, but like they say, they, they may have that thinking, oh, where there is smoke there is fire, et cetera, et cetera.

• 43:51 - 44:10

But, you know, do the investigation properly. Don't just have a one mind, don't have a colonized mind that, you know, oh, they're in a overcrowded house. Well, let's remove them. There's no food in the cupboard. Well, sorry, but there's two tins of baked beans that's regarded as food.

• 44:10 - 44:16

Or even they're sleeping on a mattress on the floor. You know, like that's, if you, if you are poor, poor, that's frowned upon. But if you're rich, then you've developed the Montessori style of sleeping on a mattress on the floor, then that's trendy.

• 44:23 - 45:03

You know, I've got here, and Nicole's has put down is Aboriginal Legal Aid. Is there any Aboriginal legal aid workers? I assume Legal Aid was offered as a free service. Why isn't it offered to Aboriginal community member? It's actually not free in some cases. And it's also cost scaled as well. So you've gotta be on a certain income to, to get, like, if you're on a healthcare card, you'll often get Legal Aid, but if you've actually been working and the cutoff is really low, it's like, I don't know, don't quote me right now, there's like \$28,000 a year.

• 45:03 - 45:35

So, and then there it becomes a bit sliding scale and then when you get to another number, they go, no, you're, you can afford your own lawyer. Yeah. That's how it kind of works. It's, it's across the board because we are forever wanting to appeal a decision. We're forever wanting to oppose a decision. We're forever wanting to vary an order. And all of those things does not come under legal aid.

• 45:36 - 45:40

That's not Aboriginal legal aid, that's just legal aid in itself.

• 45:42 - 46:16

So if, if you're not rich to lose and they run away with that shit, they do, they really do run away with it because they know, oh, I'm going to Phil, and they'll tell our clients that, you know, they'll tell our families that. And then when we get into the nitty gritty, oh, you gotta pay for, lawyer should do that. We may have some lawyer that say, oh, we just do it, you know, or then we'll, um, we'll say, well, look, get, get back with them.

• 46:16 - 46:49

Get all your support. Because we don't go to court with families, but mum or dad, unless they actually engaged in support to help themselves and therefore help them when, if their children were to be returned. So, you know, and we do that even prior to a child being removed, you know? So sometimes we can't go in on, act as a preventative. And again, that's what we do because we're the baby that raise the child.

• 46:49 - 47:12

We we're the auntie, we're the grandmother. And, and you don't have to be blood related to be called Auntie. You don't have to be blood related to called mum. You was the older

mum that I got <laugh>, all the little nannies, you know, running around and, but they're happy. They're, they're healthy. I get really concerned that little two-year-old baby.

• 47:35 - 48:18

And that's another thing that GMAR does. We bring families together in carnivals because we say that, no child should be, socially and athletically deprived because of no money. So, you know, we ask around to all the organizations and even the bread shops and Butcher or whatever, just so these children can get to, you know, sporting events like the carnivals.

• 48:19 - 48:51

Wow, what'd you do? And I wanted to add too, that, you know, I, being part of GMAR, I'm on the GMAR email running around trying to locate a bed for someone in a mattress for somebody just so they can keep their kid at home because child protection said they, if they don't have a bed by tomorrow night, they're not, they're keeping out safe there. And I've even driven a bed from my house to Northcote, for someone just so that they can actually make sure that when child protection assesses them the next day, there's five beds, they're not four.

• 48:53 - 49:27

So it's the real, which is impractical, unrealistic, you know, but it's like a David and Goliath fight. They hold the power and so that we don't compromise the child being removed or not being returned to family. We jump through the hoops for 'em. I mean, we, when we did have we had our funding around from pay the rent we had back to school programs, which would help once the mum's families came back home.

• 49:28 - 50:12

We supported mum with washing machines. We supported mum, mum and dad with beds, you know, because they didn't have their children with them for about six months or to six years. And another, another thing that I'm concerned about lately is, children with ADD and, you know, emotional disorders and all that, if they're being removed from their parents, they're actually, there's proof we've seen it, that a worker will just leave that child sitting near a TV without anything that a mother would've done, you know, that a mother or a father would've done to, I guess what, what do you call it?

• 50:12 - 50:55

That the kids with autism and stuff like that, intellectual place, disability responders, you know, like mum, mum would give them the music or the feeling and all that. They, that they, there is proof that these children, there's two that we know of, was put in a motel room and left there with a tv. Another one is in a res unit with no family visiting and no sibling with me, you know, understand that case mum and dad are right off track with the, you know, self-medicate and really, really bad.

• 50:55 - 51:17

But the grandmother never gave up. So the, the child is deprived from seeing the grandmother. The child is deprived from seeing the siblings, which legally is wrong. Yeah. And that's happening, you know, and then we have, then we have reports where there's two cases we're taking, taken to court.

• 51:17 - 51:53

One child was raped in a res care unit and they're admitting to it. They're all, you see the email, you see the minutes. So, you know, we have reporters talking to that family now. And then we have another case where a young girl, was sexually assaulted in a carer's house and they're saying, he's been assessed. The young man's been assessed and he is not of high risk. So they kept that child with, with that carer, mind you, that carer is non-Aboriginal.

• 51:54 - 52:22

Yeah. And we, we, we see those differences, you know, sadly, that we have to, you know, allay to 'em, but it's happening and it's sad. We need to wind up. And I wanna say one thing to you. If, if I gave you a magic wand and not a broomstick where some people think you might need it, <laugh>, but the magic wand, cause you are like a fairy godmother to people, what would you change?

• 52:26 - 52:58

I'd change a system where it's, it's more flexible and it's gotta be in line with non-Aboriginal children. I, because you know, realistically there are gonna be, there are gonna be parents that can't, can't look after their children, you know, but hey, look at the grandparents, look at the auntie, look at the uncles. You know, I'd, I'd change all that change the colonized way of thinking about our mob.

• 52:59 - 53:29

Yeah. Well thanks Aunty Reio for joining us tonight. As always. I love hanging out with you and we'll talk soon, but I just want everyone to say thank you for Aunty Reio for, for joining us in tonight and thank you for coming because this thing, this needs to be heard because I believe if people are not talking about this, then people would think that it's not happening.

• 53:30 - 53:53

Yeah. It is happening. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. It's sad. Yeah. Thank you so much eye. Thank you. Thank you darling. All over. Good man. And, and wish as good luck for Carnival in the next three days. <laugh>. Good luck. Bye.