



Transcript White Noise Podcast

Episode Two– Reimagining Royal Commissions: giving up power with Yoorrook
Commissioner Sue-Anne Hunter

Sue-Anne Hunter speaking over White Noise Soundtrack

We're taught in, these white systems that were in charge and that we can't give up our power in the room. One of the first things I did I just gave up that power to my people.

White Noise Soundtrack

Jaynaya

Welcome to White Noise, the podcast of the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub at Melbourne Law School. You just heard our soundtrack, White Noise, written and recorded by our friend John Wayne Parsons, Yuggera and Meriam Le baritone singer and manager and Murrup Barak, the Melbourne Institute for Indigenous development.

I'm Jaynaya Dwyer, Research Fellow, all-round task doer and now podcast host at the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub. I'm a non-Indigenous lawyer of Anglo-Indian heritage and I'm so lucky to be learning about First Nations' advocacy and justice at the Hub every day.

Today, I'm sharing a conversation with the incredible Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung woman and Commissioner Sue-Anne Hunter, Deputy Chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission. We got together and recorded on Sue-Anne's country in Naarm at Melbourne Law School in the Digital Studio. We pay respects to the elders of these lands, past and present, and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people listening. Sue-Anne has worked in Aboriginal child and family welfare for over 20 years and is recognized for her work on trauma.

Sue-Anne is one of five commissioners of the Yoorrook Justice Commission currently underway in Victoria.

In Sue-Anne's words...

Sue-Anne

The Yoorrook Justice Commission is Australia's first formal truth-telling body. We are a Royal Commission and we are for the State of Victoria. And Yoorrook means truth in Wamba Wamba.

Jaynaya

The first formal truth-telling process in Victoria have the important task of looking into past and ongoing injustices experienced by Traditional Owners and First Peoples in Victoria in all areas of life and since the beginning of colonization. The Commission will run for at least three years. We discussed the challenges of setting up and re-imagining a Royal Commission to do this work with authenticity and safety, to hold people through this process under Victoria's Treaty framework. The Truth-Telling work of the Commission will feed into the Treaty process, forming a foundation for negotiation and a public record to build understanding and treaty-readiness amongst us all.

And a reminder that the views of our incredible guests on this podcast do not necessarily reflect the views or research of the Indigenous Law and Justice Hub.

This conversation discusses themes of colonization, genocide, and racial violence. If this conversation raises difficult feelings for you, we encourage you to seek out some of the resources in our show notes. You can find the show notes and a full transcript of this episode on the Hub's website.

-Interlude-

Jaynaya:

Sue-Anne: Tell us about yourself, where you come from, who your mob is, and the values that drive you and your work.

Sue-Anne

Yes. I'm at Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung woman, So I'd like to acknowledge country and my elders and ancestors. We've got a voice today because they've all of those that come before us. A lot of people that fought hard for us to be here. I guess, the values that drive me are the same values as my mob that were community, that we do things together. But particularly that we care about future generations. And also being a mum, that drives me a lot to be able to do the work that I do. But it's also about justice for our people. And how do we be part of a community that helps seek justice for our people, for all those wrongs that have done to us. So we can't do it alone and we do it together. And I think I just want to add to those pieces of work that is being done.

In didn't set out to be where I am today? I set out to make a difference for my people. But again, my education was later in life and not, umm. I hated school and we were the only Aboriginal family at our school and I struggle and I still struggle with universities today. I'm dyslexic and highly dyslexic. And to get to where I've gotten finished my masters in social work and just about to look at a PhD, but to be able to have people that took me on that journey. And they weren't Aboriginal people, there were white people, and that wasn't condescending in any way, shape, or form. But to have the backing of my mob to do that. I don't mind working in uncomfortable. And so I'll go into those spaces that our mob are vulnerable in and try and change them so they feel safe in them. I think some people have to make a stand.

I'm really honored that I have strong women in my family, really strong women that I've been able to learn from and guide me to be where I am and I watched, you know, growing up, my dad go to meetings and just do what needed to be done, but even the injustices that happened to him. So it's not only fighting for my daughter, but also those before me that didn't get their piece of justice. And so that's what really drives me. And it's not, I didn't feel like I needed to go to Uni I thought there are skills you learn, of course and information you learn, um, and you need it, but you also feel like you're given into the white system. So it's really, it's like working at Yoorook, we're in this white System but fighting for justice for our people. So how do we use this system against them?

Jaynaya

Your background is as a cultural and clinical therapist and a social worker with a long history in Aboriginal health, including at the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency and SNAICC,

the national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, recognized for your work on trauma. I've often reflected that lawyers who are working with people in really tough situations. And I wish I'd been taught more about trauma and its impacts and supporting people through this and legal education. I wanted to ask you, what are some of the key misconceptions about trauma and particularly trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here.

Sue-Anne

One of the things that I always say, I've done a lot of training with people around trauma-one of the things I always say to practitioners or in any discipline is genuinely people come across angry and it's the trauma response.

Trauma is something that happens to you that overwhelms and you can't cope and if you think about that from 1788 and colonization, and parents trying to survive and children being taken. And you think about that through all the generations, it interrupts a lot of your skills as a parent, general life skills - it interrupts your brain development. And so anybody that deals with people, particularly in their hard times and doesn't understand trauma. It's actually, you're not getting the full responses of people have what they need to say.

Because generally most people become frustrated and our Mob gets the raw end of the stick majority of the time. And so they're already angry and it just builds. And so if the trauma started from your grandparents to your parent, it just gets passed down. It's what you can see that it affects you.

So it's complex, but it's also understanding the other person's perspective of why they are where they are.

And it comes back to your way of dealing with people and having empathy and compassion. But also what you hear them saying underneath that trauma. Particularly I think its 20-years with the out-of-home care system and juvenile justice system, and specifically parents that are losing their children in a court, and then they've never seen a lawyer before. And then all of a sudden come in and they're asking all these questions. They're overwhelmed. They about to loose their child. And they can't grasp it and there's emotion involved and when you understand trauma sort of got a window of tolerance and they've already been pushed out of that, so they're going to heightened and they're already going to go off. And understanding that trauma response is really important in those stressful situations.

Something I did with an elder who was stolen gens is he used to come in and yell a lot and no one in our office wanted to talk to him, because once someone starts telling you don't listen. So I remember saying to him, 'Uncle, let's talk about trauma.' We had really quick 101 on trauma and where it sits, so I said 'so when you yell at people, that's just trauma talking. So next time you come in to just ask for me and we'll sit down, talk. And after a while of talking, when he started yelling he goes, 'oh that's my trauma, what do I gotta do? I got to stop. I've got a breathe', so we were able to teach him that. If he stops and breathes and it's okay to stop conversations in the middle and whatever it is to have those moments to think is okay. And that rushed situation was never helpful for him. So he had a new way of talking and if saying I'm going to stop now because my trauma is talking and I'm going to yell at you. I'll swear at you. And was helpful for him for a lot of a lot of things that he had to do in life.

Jaynaya

What advice would you give to lawyers or to law students about how trauma might impact their work?

Sue-Anne

We're taught in this, these white systems that were in charge and that we can't give up our power in the room. One of the first things I was trained in a white system was I just gave up that power to my people. And That's a big one, particularly for our mob. Because there's so many injustices that have happened. And it doesn't matter I think which area of law you will. There's something in it because we're custodians of this land. And if it's even it's something to do with land, this is something that I would just have empathy and compassion. And I think being a therapist, I probe people a bit for their story and I think understanding this story helps you - They're here. It's their life. They have control. You don't lose anything. You actually gain something because whatever discipline of practice you're in, by understanding and knowing their story helps you with the next person. And you learn a lot of the people that come to you. And they come to you because they need help. And we can't be the experts in everything. So they are the experts in their life. And I think if we remember that, it's helpful.

Jaynaya

Oh, really so important, I think for everyone working in the system, but particularly lawyers who aren't often reminded of that from the system than they work in, but they keep coming back to it regularly.

The role of the Yoorrook Commission is to enable truth, understanding and transformation in relation to First People's experiences of colonization. That is to say that you're tasked with the role not only of capturing stories, but making sure that they're understood by the wider public and making recommendations on systemic reform. In your interim report, a line that stood out to me was that many elders have questions about Yoorrook, how it will be different, perhaps speaking to the many inquiries that have come before where First Nations people have generously shared their stories with not enough understanding or transformation. What motivated you to get involved and put yourself forward to be a commissioner in this historic process.

Sue-Anne

That sounds big, it is - it's messy and we're reminded daily how big the task is. And the reason is my background in trauma and understanding. I don't want people re-traumatized, and I want people held in a space that they feel safe to tell their stories. And then how those stories are then put into recommendations. I felt I could help assist in that process. And knowing community. I know a lot of community as well, which helps bring trust and it needs to be authentic. We can't just go head saying we just want your story. We need to really listen and having the training in those areas I thought would be an asset to the Commission. And so that's why I did it. And I nearly pulled out a few times because it's so big, but we managed to get through and I'm here now where you are and I wake up some days going am I still a commissioner? I can't believe this because It's such an honor. And even though we've done that five weeks on country and heard elder's voices, who else gets to hear that? Like the stories, they're already in five weeks, that will never leave me. Who else gets those experiences of hearing the words of wisdom and sorrow and pain or resilience from elders. And so that's what I'm here for. And to be able to carry those through into something tangible is really important. And that line you said that many elders had questioned about Yoorrook,

such as how it would be different. So we currently had the Assembly and the Assembly for us and then the government agreed and they wrote the letters patent together. Part of what we have to do within the letters patent states that any information that would inform future treaties. With our interim report- our interim report wasn't just given to the governor, he was also given to the First Peoples Assembly. So there's already a balanced there. And the fact that the recommendations will be the same, they'll go to both. But we'll also have an Aboriginal body that can push those recommendations, which hasn't been done before, which gives us hope. The thing we've been saying to elders is we just want a living document, not something that sits there and collects dust- that we have a body that we'll be able to push those recommendations forward. Which also means all those recommendations before- deaths in custody and the bringing them home report on all those little inquiry will be using those while making recommendations on our research to see what people have already done. It's big. It goes from 1788 to current. So we have to draw on work that's already done - A big mandate for such a short time. We were originally given three years, we've asked for an extra two. So hopefully, I think we're gonna get the two years, but that will still leave some of it undone that we won't be able to get to it.

Jaynaya

To bring together everything that's come before.

Sue-Anne

Exactly. Yeah.

Jaynaya

What advice do you give to elders and others engaging with the Commission about how their voices and stories will be valued and heard to inform future action.

Sue-Anne

So one of the things is, this is a first in a Royal Commission is we've got Indigenous data, sovereignty principles. So rather than, I'm not sure, like the Bringing Them Home report there was lots of stories just out there and published on websites and with Yoorrook our indigenous data sovereignty principles mean you tell us how we use your data. So in the interim report, you'll see lots of quotes from elders. There were a lot more, but they didn't want them used in. So at the end of a Royal Commission at all packaged up and give them back to the government. So we're actually trying to change laws at the moment so it goes back in a black box and they can access and use those stories, unless they've been given permission. So some people might want theirs to just to be the family. They might not want anybody to know. They may want them just to open and public, which is fine. Or they may just want to use with their own clan or group. They get to say, they can have parts that are public and parts that are private, which we've already started doing as well. So this is a first, we've had to pull the whole computer system, some I'm becoming in IT expert around how, how this works. And people have already started asking us about Indigenous data sovereignty principles. And Commissioner Maggie Walter, that's your area of expertise. And so I'm learning that part of it as we go along.

We also have supported submissions, and so we'll have someone support them doing their submission if they don't feel comfortable doing it themselves.

But also knowing from a trauma perspective, we won't introduce new relationships. We will support their support people. If they don't have support people, then we will support them.

Jaynaya

The Commission's role in developing understanding of the general public really reminded me of the Commission's counsel and our friend Tim Goodwin's words at the launch of the Indigenous law and justice Hub - That truth-telling necessitates truth listening by non-Indigenous people. What are your hopes for how non-Indigenous Victorians will engage with the Commission's work.

Sue-Anne

But people have to be prepared, right? Because truth-telling is hard, but for non-Indigenous people, it's harder to hear. It's so hard to hear. And it's not a blame game. It's not to make you feel guilty. It's the understanding. We need people to understand. The narrative of Victoria has been written by the colonizer. And this is the first time our voice will be heard and form part of that. And so it doesn't take anything away from people. And this is what I keep telling people. We're not taking anything away from you. We're actually trying to enrich you. Come together at the end of these for a better Victoria – I sound like a politician now.

That's what we've gotta do, we've gotta bring along the border Victoria alone. Because we need a strategy of how we educate what Victorian, what that looks like. So there's a lot involved in that. So it's not only going at public speaking, we don't have roles of it. A traditional commissioner generally, they don't speak to the public, they don't go. This is so different. This has to be different. And it can't be the same because it's Indigenous led as well. So we'll use all forms of media that possibly can, but we really need to use our people's stories. It's bringing along the hearts and minds. The other thing is people need to be able to trust us. There can't be any truth without trust. So we have to gain the trust of not only I won't community, but the larger community. And how do we do that - Without diluting stories or without worrying about things like white guilt or are people going – 'here we go again, the Aboriginal people are at it again' so it's a big task. We're still figuring it out, but we've got lots of allies as well that have asked us to come and speak and talk. And just in different areas, the understanding of what this is or of Aboriginal peoples. It resistance and struggles is just at different levels in community, in the wider community. We've got to aim at it everybody, and it's a difficult task. And I'm, the thing is I ask people to tell people about it and to talk about it, and to make it part of their conversation so that other people talk about it. It's big and we're still, I think it's going to change considerably as we go along and what we hear and interim report we did put in videos. So if you go into the online one and you can see video of the elders talking, it's difficult because I've see us as facilitators of voice and truth. And it's not for us to tell the story, and they can tell the story of themselves. So we've got lots of video and audio that we do.

Jaynaya

I imagine part of that is that there are a lot of people in Victoria who would think that they did know our history and that first coming to realisation. And we see that that as discomfort in the classroom. Sometimes we're teaching where people really didn't have a sense that they knew the history, that they had a sense of what had happened and they're coming to know what you didn't know before you can learn the truth and what advice would you give to people coming through that experience?

Sue-Anne

I always tell people do the research of just the land that you're living on the land your work on first and have a good understanding of that. Because from that, if you're interested isn't sparked by that, I don't know what will spark it. Because then you can start to hear about other areas in Victoria or other areas. And wherever you go understand who the Traditional Owners are. It doesn't have to be big, it doesn't have to start big. And there's so many cultural sites at their visit and go and explore and understand the land you live on. It sounds pretty simple, right?

Jaynaya

But it's a huge it's a huge thing.

Sue-Anne

Yeah

Jaynaya

to open your heart and mind.

Yoorrooks vision as a transform Victoria based on truth and justice and grounded and First People's enduring spirit, cultures and self-determination. The Yoorrook Commission has the powers of a Royal Commission, but operates very differently to the Royal Commission that lawyers and law students listening might recognize - embedding Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing in all of its operations. So I wanted to talk to you a bit about what that looks like for people who might not have known about this before. So indeed, the interim report states Yoorrook's first year of operations involved many complex design and conceptual decisions about what its model should be. This is a unique challenge as every step required an evaluation of the cultural appropriateness of how a Royal Commission ordinarily operates. So tell us about your processes and particularly those related to supporting social and emotional well-being of the people who share their stories?

Sue-Anne

Yeah. I mean, even just to start with, we didn't just we didn't want the normal Court. That no one's higher than anybody else, that Aboriginal people on the stand will not be cross-examined about their truth, which is really important. We also did at the launch, a cultural launch where we had ceremony. When we go into communities, we have attained that going for us to make sure that people know where they are, but to also check what cultural protocols we need to follow. Welcomes done and cultural exchange if needed. What do people need culturally whilst in the space? And that's individual, we've got all different cultural practices were not the same.

So I ask questions sometimes, what's the minimum of law required in this room at this time to make because people need to feel safe. Do we need a lawyer with that? That's not to offend the lawyers. That's to make people feel safe to tell their truth.

So we didn't have offices at the time either. And so we Charcoal Lane had closed down as a restaurant. We transform that into what you might call a courtroom, but we're all on the same level.

So Charcoal Lane was restaurant recently, but before that it was the first Aboriginal health service. And so when I walked in, it wasn't set up at all at that point and I was like, Oh my God, those stairs. So I remember going there as a kid and right at the top they had the dentist and I remember going there with my dad and getting told off running up and down the stairs as kids. And I thought, wow, if I feel okay here and it brings up these memories and I feel good. It's intentional.

Jaynaya

Beautiful you have such a strong association and positive with the dentist.

Sue-Anne

Well, it wasn't it wasn't but you know. It's got told off for that, but it was a place of gathering for our people, might have been just a health service for outside people, but even elders that walked in and said, Oh, I remember this place, I come here because of...and Fitzroy is quite significant because in the times when people started moving down to vote, when that's the area they moved into. So being on Gertrude straightened, having that history that rich people automatically felt safe. If you go on a website and listened to the hearings, you'll hear the trams in the background. And it always felt good going in there. Well, what's going in there? And for me, my dad's passed, my nan's past, but knowing that were part of that in those buildings and then our people before us were there.

There was a smoking done at the start and the end of the day that everybody had a possum skin where there were sitting, which was vitally important for trauma.

Jaynaya

Absolutely. I think that's a great reminder for students listening around understanding the background to all of these legal processes and dynamics and the justification to why they're happening. Because once you understand that, you can understand how to play with it and what is necessary, why it's necessary and what is just habit has been formed through these institutions. And what can you do and be thinking at every point about how to make people more comfortable.

Sue-Anne

Yeah so for different areas, smoking's means different things. Generally, when I was bought up I used to get a lot of smoking's with my dad to houses. And that was to ward off anything that was there that didn't need to be there. And as you know, it's sort of grown into this thing where everybody wants to smoking in. Sometimes you feel 'Aww is this...' For me. It's about bringing people into the present moment, about thinking about what you're doing. And it's a about cleansing and being mindful of the activities you're about to do. And it's sorta changed for me over time and particularly being a therapist. So having a smoking, which generally is different forms of native plants that particularly in this space of people telling stories and trauma and the weight people hold on the way in. For our mob - it's a way of one, it's a cultural practice that people feel safe around and comfortable. The actual inhaling of the eucalyptus as well is always good. But the knowing that you're there in this moment and that all that bad, and it's sitting your intentions for that hearing. For me, is so important about bringing people into that moment. And it's usually done in the importance of the ceremony that's about to happen. And it is a hearing is a ceremony. It's someone's life you're dealing with. And I don't think, I think people underestimate the fact that particularly for your students, this is one person, but that's their life. I think we forget that we're dealing with

someone's life choices, their consequences, and what this does for the rest of their lives. Their life. You get to walk away and always think about that as a therapist. Or when I go into here, someone so I get to walk away, they stuck with it. So what's going to happen afterwards? And setting the intention with a smoking for me helped start on a good, Really, really good even keel. And I'll try to keep it burning so that if anybody, something I did learn from the Canadian experience was, and this was beautiful. She said, we gave people Kleenex tissues and then they tell the story and then we get someone cultural to take them out and they'd burn them in the smoking because they're sacred tears, they are tears they've never cried the stories in. And we're told that really hit me, that fire is sacred because that's the intention for that day for them to make them feel safe. So there's a lot in those little things that you think would just do another smoking or they just tissues we're going to cry with or great, they've told their story it adds to the collection, but it's more than that. It's more than that for this person. And it should be more than that for you as the lawyer or whatever it is you are.

And so I guess I'm lucky I live and work on my Country so I know what I can and cannot do. But definitely going into other people's Countries, I'm very mindful of the history of the place, what the issues are other place knowing before we go in. But also who are the elders we need to speak to or whose community we need to speak to. Also what is going on. So there's several places we need to hold hearings because some won't go to a certain area or their family feuds or there are rifts in community. Which could again be from somewhere like Native Title. You just, you've got to know all this before you go in. So making sure that people feel safe and who they need with them is big part of it.

But also, we do have non-Indigenous people working with us, research, for instance, there's a lot of research done, the British were great at keeping notes, right? So we'll go over that. But as an Aboriginal woman, I go over that with a lens of being and what does that really mean? And I got asked a really good question. Actually, if someone told you the truth, comparing it with what's their truth, and that's why they're coming forward. But generally, if you marry something up with something that a white settler had written, you can find the truth and they're having a non-Aboriginal, we have to go back over it and look through the lens of a cultural lens or our lens, our worldview lens of as Aboriginal people to get to the middle of it.

I've learnt a lot about the law. Everything from social work and part of what I say is, how do we play with the law enough to get safety for our people? Because even bringing in wording other than evidence, witness, hearings. So we've got and you'll have to forgive me. I haven't got them with me and some of them I can't because not all our language from Victorian languages. Nuther-mooyoop -is our submission words so people don't have to be traumatized by wording that's happening. We've got a big thing about keeping it as simple as possible for our people. And so anything we do that is going up on our website. How do we make this public facing that everybody is going to be able to read and understand. And I think that's really important.

Like the Indigenous data sovereignty, we're unique. We know it's different and it's like setting up a business really, because there's nothing given to you. So for instance, even going finding accommodation, so officers we had three not three knock backs because they didn't want that sort of business within their premises were a Royal Commission and we're still get the racism.

Jaynaya

And imagining what that's like for Aboriginal small business.

Sue-Anne

Yeah. But we're all Commission. We've got these powers and people just don't the board doesn't really want that here. Or you're not going to bring enough traffic through this area for us and we're all about just like wash part of history that this is big.

Jaynaya

You should be so lucky as to have Yoorrook on your ground.

Sue-Anne

Yeah, Not only do we have to look at all the processes and how they've been set up and how we can do them differently. Like re-imagine what a Royal Commission is. We've got the racism, the institutional racism, the day-to-day racism that you don't think you would have? I mean, I might be a Commissioner, but not much has changed for me my life. It's still the same. I might get traded a bit better. But some people but the changing of because this is power dynamic.

Jaynaya

Yeah.

Sue-Anne

Right. Even though I'm a Commissioner, I still feel that I still have to walk into a place the other day. Someone said to me, or can I give you some advice as a young woman and as a Royal Commissioner and as an Aboriginal woman from a white woman. Now, I don't know any other person on a Royal Commission that would be given that advice, I won't say my age but I'm not young. I'm the youngest Commissioner. I use that. I use I use a lot, but there's not many people that would do that. So it's not, we have to force our authority onto people, which isn't what we're used to doing. But Commissioner Bell, who was a former Supreme Court judge, is another Commissioner, is very good at saying, well, no, no, that's not okay. And we'll need to ask the First Peoples on the Commission because it's stuff that we don't even see that happens that we're used to. So everything has to change. Absolutely everything, even the way we speak to people.

Jaynaya

So part of your mandate is to inquire into the breach and denial of First People's law and lore. At the Hub, we're particularly interested in how the different legal systems on this Country interact and promoting respect of First Nations law. How has the Commission considered First Peoples law so far?

Sue-Anne

We're only a year in. It is part of what's being said. So our initial outing, that was our third attempt after COVID finally got out to speak to elders. That's been brought up several times about how we deal with that. It's in the letters patent Talking about systemic injustices as well. We're not we're not gonna be shy. We're talking about not just tinkering around the edges, but changing whole systems like we, we, we don't get this chance again, right? That will come into it because it's been spoken about. I'm not sure how aware because for me, as people are telling the truth and they submit their evidence, that's where we're gonna go. And

so it's definitely going to come up what that looks like or how that plays out. I'd hate to pre-empt, but it is going to be part of it. I don't want to pre-empt stuff because everywhere I went I heard different stories in a different context of law and law. And you would be amazed, our people are so well versed in white man's law, because they've had to be, right. Some of them have already done this thinking. And when that time comes to be able to pick their brains and talk about what that looks like and what they want to say and how that plays out. It's not for me to judge. This is even the difference of a Royal Commission route. We're not just going to get all this evidence and go. Okay. This is what people said and this is what they want to say and this is a recommendation. It's gonna be place-based and thematic based. The thing we've been hearing is what happens here in Melbourne, Naarm what happens here to what happens on the borders, right on the borders. He's completely different what they might say that law there to what they might say, He could be completely different because each place has its own history, has its own stories.

Jaynaya

The Interim report states the government's Victorian Aboriginal Affairs framework has included self-determination as its underpinning principles since 2018, it is clear, however, from the Commissioners early discussions with Elders through yarning cycles, Nuthermooyoop, and Wurrek tyerrang - that current systems and policies have not delivered self-determination. First People continue to experience discrimination, dispossession, exclusion, and re-traumatization. In his testimony and Balert keetyarra Marcus Stuart noted that true self-determination, if being in the driver's seat about discussions that affect our lives. The task is how we can start re-imagining the system.

So what does self-determination mean to you? And what sort of self-determination would you like to see if your daughter and her generation?

Sue-Anne

I think self-determination has been bastardized. Like it's everywhere and it's in every government policy document. And yeah. But we don't see it. As Marcus pointed out. For me, self-determination. Is bank fully informed about I subject or matter that you can make safe, healthy decisions about, right? That's what it means for me in my life. So I'm informed enough to be able to make these healthy decisions on behalf of me, my daughter, that are safe and we can move forward. That for me also is what it means for our community. But we'd actually don't get the chance. And I think Markus spoke about having the conversations. But for me it's about having the conversations with ourselves about and having the authority to make the decisions and then those decisions being followed through. We're not even at that point where half the time excluded from the conversation. So how can we be self-determining? We have to re-imagine the systems because they work. They work perfectly to exclude us and our voices aren't heard. So we have to re-imagine these systems and I'll after whatever we've done with them, they probably wouldn't call them systems. But ways of being that we are heard and we have our fair say that the outcome of having our say that it's heard and we have less discrimination, we have, we'll have none. I'd prefer none than less. I should maybe thinking too large, I don't know. But that we're able to move forward. These systems that degrade us denigrate us, kill us, take us away from our families. Don't work for us. And we need to say in that, or we just need to rip these systems apart and rebuild them.

Jaynaya

One of the things when we first met that you said that it had stuck with me and if didn't come into my mind with you talking about and how you encourage your staff to engage with

community members and you telling the office to take the titles of their signature block phone just put their nations and you said that's your credentials here.

Sue-Anne

Yeah. That's all my signature block. I don't have anything. Just says it says commissioners, to enhance our deputy chair Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung That's it.

Jaynaya

Yeah, that's beautiful. I think so thumbs up. Ethic of practice about being with people not above them.

Sue-Anne

I think I did a talk the other day and someone was coming out with me and she said, I'd never seen this before, honestly, when she said I really noticed that one went around the room and I'm a doctor, I'm a lawyer, I'm this and that I just didn't have got to you and you just said I'm a Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung woman. But it shows I'm not a Commissioner. I am a Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung woman And people say, Oh wow You Commissioner, that's pretty high. But being a Wurundjeri and Ngurai Illum Wurrung woman woman is what's important to me not being. Because that grounds me. That's what keeps me grounded. And she was just amazed at how people introduce themselves. And I don't even notice that anymore because I just do that. It's that authenticity. But I don't think I remember as a young caseworker going into a meeting and there was a lawyer and a psychologist. And I remember feeling like I couldn't say anything because I had no title. And it's not about your title, it's about what you give to other people. And that's the value for our people, is what you give to other people to enable them to have some self-determination in their own life. And I would really encourage the students to think about what self-determination in their practice looks like for the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander clients.

Jaynaya

What if you're not an Aboriginal past and what are those credentials that you're bringing that are not your title? What what is your identity and what are you bringing to the role?

Sue-Anne

And when you're working through systems that can put pressure is around trying to change that. It's like giving up power, right? And then human because we are and no one's perfect for it. We shouldn't hold power over people because we've gone to school longer. Because we know more. You can judge people. It's easy to do. We all do a Betty too bad. How do I make this person's life better? No matter what field you're in. If you get a right for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in a legal system, the way that you treat an honor them, and the way you look at doing things differently than you got it right for all people, I reckon? Yeah. Yeah.

Jaynaya

You might have some expertise in the law, however, questionable, limited that is that people are the experts in their own lives that you need both those expertise to come together.

To round out the podcast - What are some of the moments that are stuck out to you so far, most on this.

Sue-Anne

It's just how generous our Mob are. They've told the, I think you've mentioned it in here. They've told these stories again and again. And they telling it again. And we don't know the outcome, we don't know, but the generosity that people have shared with us, we walk in and people think, What's this and a bit hostile and you walk out and people were hugging you. I didn't need to be sitting on a bench. I can walk around and I'm sitting with Auntie while she's talking to me, rubbing her back and holding her hand. Not only does it help me, and that helps her, but it also helps both of us regulate the resilience and the courage. Like I've just, I've just had this faith in humanity again, you know, when you lose it because the world so shit and that people horrible and just things happen day to day. But to go out and have the honor of hearing people's stories, the resilient- I hate the word resilience. But that's all I can think of. The only word I can think of. They're putting their trust in us and they face it. on a personal note, I've heard so many. My Dad's been passed away 20 years, but I've heard so many stories. I've had some wonderful things that I wouldn't have known he'd done. That gives me the strength to actually continue doing what I'm doing. And knowing I'm on the right, the right path. Like there's some really, I feel like a bit selfish in some of these because I'm thinking, oh my god, who gets to hear this. But my role is just to hold people in a space where they can tell their truth. And people coming and telling us stories that they hadn't even told their families. I'm just blown away by that. That's why I know my life will be changed by these stories. I'm not by any way, any illusion going into this that I'm going to hear some really horrific, horrible stuff, but I'm also going to hear some strength and resilience in the stories as well. Because they're sitting there telling you, right, It's the generosity of people.

Jaynaya

Thank you so much for joining us today Sue-Anne and for all the stories that you shared and all of the work that you're doing that's going to make this such a bad place to be. Thank you.

Sue Anne

Thank you for asking me and thank you for listening.

Jaynaya

Is there anything else that you'd like to record?

Sue-Anne

No, no, I'm fine. I sing a song now. Nah, Gammon

Interlude

Jaynaya

Thank you very much to Sue-Anne for sharing so generously with us today. And thank you to our audience for listening to White Noise. We would love to hear what you thought of this conversation.