

Yoorrook Justice Commission
SUBMISSION OF ARRON RYAN

Introduction

Yeah, g'day, I'm Arron Ryan. I'm 28 years old. I'm a proud Keeraywoorroong Gundjimarra man. I grew up in Warrnambool, Framlingham and Koroit, but lived in Melbourne for the majority of my life. I've come back home, back to my people, I guess because there's some traumas in my life.

My statement is about:

- a. my connection to my Aboriginal culture and how I see my identity.
- b. my family story.
- c. my observations of injustices against Aboriginal people.
- d. my hopes for Aboriginal people in this country.

My family background

I am of Aboriginal and Irish decent.

My mum is of Aboriginal descent. My dad and his parents are of Irish decent.

My name derives from my Irish side of my family. My name is Arron, spelt A-R-R-O-N- that's Irish spelling for 'Aaron'. My middle name is Aloysius- that means 'God' in Irish.

My mum and my mum's mum are Austins, from Framlingham.

Mums from the Stolen Generation. Mum was born in Melbourne, but then she was taken at birth. She was moved up to the High Country in Victoria, pretty much near Mount Buller and lived there till she was about 16 or 17 and then moved back to Melbourne.

Mum's mum moved to Melbourne for work, and she died quite young - died age 39. Mum's mum was a chronic alcoholic, which is obviously a big issue in the Aboriginal communities because of colonisation.

When my mum's mum died, she left mum pretty much by herself. Mum didn't really know who her siblings were and then she went on a journey to try and find her own family. Then she found her family. She never really knew where she was from until she was about 25 or 26 years old.

My connection to culture and my identity

I grew up in Koroit with my dad and my grandparents, who are of Irish descent. They were also very big with the Aboriginal community and my dad knocked around out here at Framlingham.

My connection to Aboriginal culture is that my dad always used to bring me back to these places. I remember coming out to where I'm sitting today at Uncle Lenny's place, as a young fella and learning the culture and learning how it is to be a proud Aboriginal person.

I am the youngest of 7 and me being the youngest in my family, you learn a lot off your siblings, your aunties, and your uncles, that's for sure.

For my siblings growing up in a country town that's a very white supremacist sort of town, they would have definitely copped racism a lot more racism than me.

In all honesty, I didn't really cop much racism in my life because a lot of people thought that I was white. But then you'd stand up and they'd still think you're white, but then they'd realise - this guy's actually black.

I learnt it from my mum in a way that you don't really trust the white person - even though I'm pretty pasty white skin myself. But it's more that she was taken away as very young person and she didn't trust the white system because of her injustice and that led me to not really trust the white system.

And my dad, even though he's white, sort of drilled it into me that you don't really trust the white person because they're not overly too good for you, and you learn your cultures and your values from your Aboriginal side and that will get you a very long way in life.

I always said, it doesn't matter what colour of your skin, it's what's in your heart at the end of the day.

What are some of the key issues facing Aboriginal people in this country?

The fact that the white person brought bottles of alcohol along and in all honesty, it's probably worsened their life expectancy because a lot of these things that white people have brought to this country. We used to live free and all that kind of stuff, now we've got cigarettes, now we've got drugs and all that kind of stuff which never happened before colonisation.

I think the big issues now are Indigenous health care, especially Indigenous mental health services because, like, in all honesty, living out on a mission it does get quite lonely sometimes and you turn to the bottle, and you turn to other things.

We need to get more services out to rural communities especially. Up the road is Koorie Health Services and Gundjimarra Aboriginal Cooperative and they both do fantastic jobs under the circumstances. But it could be invested in a lot more to help out the Indigenous people - especially mental health, and drug and alcohol counselling.

My hopes for Aboriginal people in this country and thoughts on how to redress injustice

We definitely need to heal the past because it's dark. It's dark, especially for the Elders. I'm too young to experience what these people, my Elders, have experienced in their time and I just think it's just pure racism at its finest.

White people don't like Aboriginal people and that's just a simple fact of life. We will never sit on the same level as a white person and that's just how colonisation works.

What I think needs to happen to address the injustices experienced by Aboriginal people is if we could get as close to sitting on the same pedestal as a white person, we could do very good things for our community.

My opinion is - we're not looking to sook about it. We're looking to reunite as a country and if that means we have to work with the white people, then so be it.

We need to also come together, even though we've gone through thousands of years of injustice in our lives, we need to be bigger and better and stronger and say 'look, we want to help'.

We want to help the next generation, regardless of if they're black or white and try and educate them for a better future to try and teach people that - look, Aboriginal people aren't as bad as white people put them out as.

I think there needs to be a separate identity for Aboriginal people to try and bring us together as people and make us rise to the top, where we're sitting on an equivalent pedestal to what a white person is. That is why I'm going to vote 'yes' on The Voice because I feel like we definitely need a chance to be able to govern ourselves in a way because we never got that opportunity in the first place.

I feel like we've got a pretty bright future if we get the chance to have a future- if we can get a chance off the Australian Government to actually look after ourselves.

END OF SUBMISSION