

## Yoorrook Justice Commission

### Statement of Anonymous 476

I currently work in an Aboriginal identified role in a government organisation. The concerns in my submission are not only in relation to the systematic discrimination that is faced by not just myself in relation to my role, but for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that we are meant to service. And highlighting that it doesn't matter what the government continuously do. We are constantly just experiencing more and more discrimination and racism. I feel that every day, as an Aboriginal person.

I have a bachelor's degree and two postgraduate degrees. I've sat on many advisory groups in relation to Aboriginal mental, emotional and social wellbeing. I've worked really hard with some prominent people in the past in relation to Aboriginal mental health, in particular populations. I've worked on programs to improve mental health and social wellbeing.

Working with my current employer, I am constantly told that I literally have been employed just because I'm Aboriginal. Not for my skill set, not for my professional connections, not for my professional knowledge. The fact that my speciality is that I'm an Aboriginal person. It's- How can I say? It's a continuous battle uphill to be taken as more than my cultural heritage.

I have been asked whether I 'ticked the boxes' for all my university qualifications. I did not, and I didn't do that because I never wanted to be put into a box where I actually was asked whether I 'ticked the boxes' as an Aboriginal person.

I went to a private school. But I get asked whether now that I go there as a disadvantaged Aboriginal child, not taking into account that my father worked three different jobs and that my mum also worked, and I came from a family of really strong concepts of providing every person in the family with opportunities.

I go into work and some days no one talks to me because they don't need to consult about an Aboriginal person. Some people will come up and talk to me or consult with me because they actually identify that I have more to offer.

However, the manager constantly reminds me if I step out of my role as being an Aboriginal person, they remind me that I am there for my speciality. They remind me that I am there only to give consults on Aboriginal families that come in.

Where I work, if you come in to the organisation as a client and you are an Aboriginal person, you will always be listed as 'urgent' because you fit into the category of a priority group. So, people who come in as clients and are Aboriginal, automatically get flagged as an urgent client matter because of their Aboriginality.

If you're an Aboriginal woman and you are pregnant, you get an unborn report made on you because you come from a background of intergenerational trauma. So therefore, you need that extra support from the government.

I'm a firm believer in diverting away from child protection. Where I work is a really interesting space to be working in, but where I work we automatically want people to be involved with a statutory body, and especially if you're Aboriginal.

I'm not saying that there aren't risks, but I also grew up in a family where because my grandmother had 17 children, that every Sunday after mass, all the nuns and the social workers would come around and ask my nan and my pop if they wanted to give any of their kids up for a better life. And my dad grew up in that situation.

So, I remember that, but it's I also that I recognise the facts for people that put them at risk. But I don't look and say, 'oh, they're Aboriginal. We need to take their children, or we need to do a report'. And that's what happens all the time where I work. At my work, it's almost as if the staff say 'they are Aboriginal, the mum's pregnant so they're at risk mum's pregnant'.

I've never been a victim of family violence, and I've never been a victim of sexual violence. So even when those conversations are happening, it's really unnerving because it's almost like that we are pictured as being, you know, that we're in our jobs because we're Aboriginal, but because we've also got a lived experience, because we've all experienced child abuse and we've all experienced this. And these aren't changing, you know? These things are very much there every single day.

I get quizzed on my card. I get quizzed on where I live. And everything is about the fact that I'm not supposed to have university degrees. I'm not supposed to have a nice car, I'm not supposed to live where I live because I'm supposed to be a disadvantaged Aboriginal person and come from a disadvantaged family.

It's almost like these are the conversations that occur on a daily basis. Before I came here this morning, I had you know, someone touch base with me about a board application. And because I'm blonde, blue eye, and I look like my mum, who's German, I actually got asked

about my Aboriginality. So my comment was, you know, and I say it very flamboyant because I think it's just, you know, it's I've had this over the years.

I've just I just say to this person who was questioning me, "yeah, I've just had a bit of milk added to me, a bit more milk added than normal". Being questioned about my Aboriginality on the basis of my skin colour is a real thing in Victoria. I never felt like I was being questioned in the Northern Territory. I was never questioned in Queensland. We come to Queensland and we're accepted. We don't get asked. We go back to Melbourne, and we muck around about the milk. We always make the milk comment, you know?

So, it's interesting, but one of my biggest and recent concerns has been the level of racism and bullying that I had previously been exposed to. This filtered over into an Aboriginal man who presented to at my work. He presented that they decided to put the entire building into a lockdown. No one consulted with me. Even though the practice standards is that the Aboriginal person- the ancestors have joined us. No. Even though the process would be that I was consulted with, they decided not to consult with me and the individuals who had decided not to speak to me.

I had raised issues with backup, my employer regarding this disdain and disregard for the Aboriginal culture. And the absolute disregard of my position and my knowledge that individual should not have experienced what he experienced that day.

And this man, he went down for a cigarette while the building was in lockdown, and the police showed up. And the concern is for me, is that it was handled by non-Aboriginal practitioners, non-Indigenous, non-Aboriginal people. However, it was deemed to be handled in a culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate manner. But there was no cultural overlay.

I was crying about all of this because the concept of being shunned and I felt shamed and shamed by an entire workplace. I told a person who I work with how I felt and I was told to calm down. I was told that what happened was organisational policy. And that it resulted in a good outcome.

Some of the people that I work with have made comments that are discriminating and racist, not just towards Aboriginal individuals, but also people of Indo-Chinese populations. And they have made these comments in front of others.

So would I say there is a level of racism where I work? Yes, I do. If we look at the level of diversity amongst staff where I work, no one's Aboriginal and no one comes from where English is a second language. They're all Australian born.

I have done what I can internally to expose the racism and discrimination towards me. And it's just this ongoing thing, you know? This constant thing of being told by people numerous times that I'm employed just because I am Aboriginal. I think that is such a hurtful thing to say because every one of us that work in the system, we're there because we're culturally proud but we're there because we have a passion for the work we do.

But we're actually more than the word 'Aboriginal'. We have such a big cultural part. I don't get involved. I don't get included in anything. So literally some days I just sit there because, you know, I get paid as an Aboriginal person to be at the office.

I'm supposed to be consulted. But sometimes I actually don't get told or consulted. Sometimes I don't get told until the very end where it's a case closure, because if it's an Aboriginal family, I've got to be consulted.

I have seen staff refer Aboriginal people to mainstream workers, and then call them "just a couple of druggies". And these staff sit there and make assessments and risk assessments on our Aboriginal people. It's almost that shaming. So, it's almost like every day I go to work and there's another shaming concept that occurs, or there's that other concept of being shunned.

For me, this is all so disheartening because these are Aboriginal people who needed some dignity. They never have the right to complain. And then we criminalise people all over again.

So, I now have non-Aboriginal staff providing cultural knowledge, cultural information on rites of passage, which is so wrong because the rites of passage they're actually talking about don't exist in Australia literally. But I'm not allowed to actually tell them if I ask to have a conversation with an Aboriginal person, an Aboriginal practitioner around the concept of shame and a non-Aboriginal person joins that conversation I'm not allowed to tell that person that I'm having that they wouldn't understand what that myself and, you know, as two Aboriginal people we're talking about, we're no longer actually allowed to exclude them. It's just an ongoing cycle that is happening on a daily basis.

We're not being proactive. We're not providing self-determination. We're not even asking Aboriginal people when they come in you know, what they would like to happen for them. We're not even providing that support.

For me personally, I'm looking for another job. Would I ever go back to a position where I have Aboriginal in front of my name? Probably not. Because the difficulties are real and they're hard. I take my hat off to every single person that has fought, you know, to have that.

I've, you know, I have absolute respect. But could I do it again? Carry this burden? For all these years I have been in the workplace, that this is where the burden is. I've been accepted by lots of communities around Australia and doing lots of focus work with Aboriginal communities. And then to be an Aboriginal person in an Aboriginal identified role where I am treated lower than a town dog.

And that's how I feel. I actually feel like I am almost like at a level of a community dog, you know, and I know that's such a Northern Territory thing, but that that is what it is. I work in an environment where I don't even have a cultural advisor. I feel shame and when I feel shunned, I have no one. And then everyone in my life are older, so I'm not going to ring up and start burdening people because in my family, I keep professional from my family, doesn't agree with a lot of my career choices because of their own history and their own trauma.

And what I have experienced in the workplace, it's been really hard for me to reconcile, particularly that level of bullying. And this is how they treat their Aboriginal staff.

**END OF STATEMENT**