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 TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW – DENISE SWEET

DENISE SWEET: Hi. My name's Denise Sweet. I'm a Bundjalung Gumbaynggirr woman, but I've lived on Gunaikurnai land since the age of six, and then Wurundjeri land since the age of 11, working and, at the moment, currently on Wergaia country.

So first of all, I have, yeah, I'm a married lady with three adult children, three granddaughters, one grandson, and, anyway, first of all I'd like to start talking about massacres. I've learnt over the years a lot about my story that I didn't know when I was very young, but Mary – sorry – Mary Olive, one of my apical ancestors, she lived as a traditional woman on Bundjalung Gumbaynggirr country. She – her first entire family was slaughtered – her mother, father, children, husband – everybody. Every – every single person that was in her family was slaughtered in the massacre. So she was put at – placed onto Yulgilbar Station which was run by Ogilvie and, to this day, still when I hear that name or I see that name Ogilvie I get agitated because the history about Ogilvie is very white-lensed, and the way that they portray him to be such a hero and all this sort of stuff really upsets me because there's no mention of us ever being in that place – my lineage being in that place. So that really, really gets me going.

So when she arrives on Yulgilbar Station, she has three further children – Mary, Annie and David Olive – and then, for some reason, she – Mary – I come off with the lineage of Mary on that side – on one side of my family. Mary marriage Joseph Jules Duroux. He must have been over here from France or something like that, working on the land there. So they had a lot of children. I can't remember exactly how many. I would have to count them off the family tree. And she – they lived in Cangai, which is C-a-n-g-a-i, when they got off Yulgilbar Station, and they were working in the coal mines there. And there's actually a street, and the old house is still there that Mary had, you know, with Jule – Joseph Jules Duroux. The family house is still there, and then there's a street called – you know how they've got in Portland "Lovetts Lane"? Well, there's Duroux Street in Cangai.

And Mary had Frederick – Alfred Frederick Duroux, who was my great-grandfather. He was born in Cangai, and he fought in the World War I, which is interesting because I didn't learn a lot about this until I was older, again, but I used to think that he was just the old drunk that slept on the couch at the front of – on nanna's verandah when I was a kid. I didn't realise his story about the soldier settlement and men coming back and their non-Aboriginal mates no longer being their mates anymore, not being allowed to drink in the pubs, not being allowed to, you know,

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even do anything. So I didn't learn that until later in life, which is quite upsetting, how they were treated. And I see that there's been a lot of movement now. Like, if you can Google his name, it will come up about him, and all that sort of stuff, but just sad that he never got that recognition in the first instance like every other white fella that came back. And then – so they moved off country when – I don't know, like, he married Ruby Pearl Olive. Don't know whether there's a family connection there or just Ogilvie decided to name everyone on the mission as Olive. I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER: I was thinking that.

DENISE SWEET: I'm not sure. Yeah, yeah.

DENISE SWEET: And – because it happens a lot in our family – – Olive – – are marrying Olives, so whether they were able to work it out whether they're actually related, I don't know. Ruby Pearl, my great-grandmother, she was Gumbaynggirr, and her mother was Nelly Olive and – here we go again – Nelly Olive, and Bill Cowan was their father. So that's my nanna's grandparents – the four of them – Mary Olive, Joseph Jules, Ruby – Nelly Cowan, and – Nelly Olive and Bill Cowan – William Cowan. Anyway, so they moved off country because Uncle MAn Duroux got a boxing thing, which was my grandmother's brother, and he fought in Sydney. Quite a few of the brothers, I think, except for one went to World War II. Again, no soldier settlement. And she was living in Sydney, and she met my grandfather who was Irish that lived up the road, and they had a big – they had a family of 15 kids or something like that in Crown Street, I think, Darlinghurst.

And then it was from there that [REDACTED] were taken from that street, right opposite Central Station in Sydney. They got taken up to Cowper Orphanage where they stayed, then, till they came out, basically. They seemed to want to kick them out when they were a certain age. I don't know whether I should mention this, but [REDACTED] was also in that home when [REDACTED] was a kid, and [REDACTED] likened it to – once there was a reunion, and [REDACTED] said to me, "Denise, I fought on the front line of World War II", and [REDACTED] said, "That was nothing compared to that place." So the horror for [REDACTED] as well having [REDACTED] children living in the same place that [REDACTED] was raised in was just probably too much for [REDACTED] to bear.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DENISE SWEET: So there's suffering on both sides of the family, whether it be our Aboriginal side and the injustices of the allies as well that really loved these people. So, yeah, he suffered. His family suffered as well because of all of that. Anyway, they separated, obviously, because the kids got taken or whatever. I'm not quite sure. But my step-pop, he was also Aboriginal – Raymond Donnelly. Beautiful man. Absolutely beautiful man. He told me that he seen nanna, she was so many months pregnant and homeless, living in Manly on the streets, and he had remembered her from childhood from back home, and he grabbed her and, you know, housed her and everything like that, and had a further – he got soldier settlement because he told them that he was Spanish and French Mauritian.

So he got soldier settlement out. Back in the day, Penrith was out in the bush, but now it's millions of people living there. So they got away from welfare, I suppose, that way to raise the other seven kids. And then, you know, then mum come home, [REDACTED] come home, then [REDACTED] -- was taken again and placed into -- Boys' Home because I think he wagged school, or he did something -- I can't remember what it was. That's my mum's brother that was in care with her. Mum never went back into care or anything like that, but she -- but he did, and that used to really affect mum because she used to think that, you know, like, she was his mother or something. I don't know what she thought, but she was very, very overly protective of him.

DENISE SWEET: So mum moved out of home when it was time for him to get released from there, and got a flat and got, you know, all this, so -- because she didn't want him to get into any more trouble. So she got him in there, got him -- helped him get a job, supported him, you know, to get wherever, because it was a bit toxic for him to move back into the family house. Yep. So there was a brother who thought he was the oldest -- the first of the seven children. He thought he was the oldest. He didn't know about these other two kids. So the trauma it had on him was quite immense as well. Like, and that's why it was toxic for my uncle to go back home because the other [REDACTED] want to [REDACTED] him and [REDACTED] him and get really [REDACTED]

So -- and it was all because of jealousy and them not understanding that the government had placed this onto them, not -- you know, it was -- it all became personal between mob -- between the family. So that's why mum moved out and had to make sure that her brother got, you know, the best of what he could possibly get. And then he moved on. Then he got with my uncle again, and they got into more [REDACTED] together, and it just seems -- it really affects me about my uncle because mum cared so deeply about his story, and he's a very, very isolated man that's -- I've taken him back home on country, I've explained to him who he is, what he's about. No one in the family's ever really paid him much attention. They're like -- it's like having nine only children. They're not -- they kind of like don't gel.

And so their impacts are just all quite different, you know. I suppose that, I don't know, that they never passed away at the age of 55 from [REDACTED], and my mum also passed away at a young age, and I believe it's because -- my personal opinion is because they didn't communicate, they didn't talk. They used to say nothing, and they held so much trauma in their whole entire being. But that's my personal opinion from -- and the trauma that they'd endured throughout life. So that's my Closing the Gap opinion about our mob that do die young from their -- the hard traumas and intergenerational trauma, and what's been handed down to them, and what they've had to deal with in doing life, even if they have tried to be self-determined and, you know, get it better than what their parents did, it's still -- there's still the silence.

There's still the silence by those elders that don't want to talk about it, and it makes it a bit harder to get the entry for people to find their way back home as well. Not necessarily for me, but, like, I seen it a lot when I worked at Link-Up. I seen, you know, some people just outright not wanting to know their family member because

it's been too long – it's going to open up a can of worms for them that they probably can't bear at this time in their life or whatever. Others embrace it. So it's different across the board. So when I was little, I lived – mum was a single mum, so I lived in the family home. A couple of times we moved out into a flat because there was no pensions until 1974, so if you were a single mum, and especially if you were Aboriginal, like, it was just, like – so what they did was is nanna did my birth certificate and wrote, I don't know, some bloke that she'd married before she had – like, when she was younger – but she didn't even – she was still married to him.

She never married my grandfather or pop because she was still married to this bloke that we don't even know, so there could even be a whole entire other family out there that I don't know about – none of us know about. So his name was [REDACTED], this man that she was married to that none of us know anything about. My mum and my uncle's dad is [REDACTED], and then [REDACTED] is the father of the other seven children, so I have no idea when she's – for a fertile woman, mum was her first born at 24. I find that very hard to believe if she'd been married to this other bloke for years before that. So that's always been a big question mark around my mind. I've never really looked into it.

I've tried to look for that man's name, but I've never been able to find it. So yes, that's a question mark around that and, yes, so mum is – we'll come back to mum as a single mum with me. I grew up with culture. Not language, though, because she knew little bits and pieces of words, but nanna, I think, was too scared to speak language. So she, like, picked up a few little bits and pieces but not much. I'm not sure my aunties went to a special school, and I remember all the kids in the street coming with rocks to throw at the blue bus because I used to caught the blue bus back in the day when people had a disability, and I never seen them as having a disability. All it was was because they couldn't read and write by the time they were in grade 1.

They were put into – and I really believe it was a racist thing because they're black – into a special school rather than getting them help. But in terms of a disability, I wouldn't know what you'd label them with because they're completely normal. Like, it's just not – it just doesn't make sense. But anyway, I just remember going out to get them and being excited every day when they'd come home, and people – everyone coming with rocks in the street to throw at the bus right then and hurl out racist abuse to my grandmother, and the looks that I used to get because I had blonde hair and brown eyes but, you know, quite light skin, walking down the street, holding her hand, being all excited and all that sort of stuff, and the looks – I can remember the looks. The subliminal feelings that people are just glaring at her as though she stole me.

And that's the other thing that I grew up with, is listening to a lot of non-Aboriginal people saying, "Be careful if you go up the street because there's an Aboriginal there. They're going to steal you – pinch you." So I grew up thinking that black fellas pinch white children, you know, and I'm like – because I'm not completely, at this age, understanding, you know, that mum was in a home and all that, but mum did take me up there when I was about four to the orphanage to meet the nuns – some of the good ones that actually were good role models in her life. Some of them were horrific, but there was a couple that were really good role models that I kept

relationships. One of them only just passed away last year. I always kept in contact with her. She was a really, really lovely person. Had a heart of gold.

So what else did I – where was I at? Yes, just that walking down the street with nan. I remember that. And then when we moved to Melbourne when I was six, I kept running away from school every day. I refused to go to school. I was traumatised by the life I'd known, obviously, due being raised with family community and all that sort of stuff too. Mum got married to a man in the Air Force, and he was based at Sale, and so we had to move to see her from Sydney, and I'm ashamed to say I never seen any Aboriginal people, but, as an adult, to know that there was two missions there – Ramahyuck and Lake Tyers – and it was never talked about. It really quite disgusts me. Never seen anyone in town or – not any Aboriginal people in town – or anything like that, so I felt really isolated. I didn't feel like anyone understood me. And all of a sudden, our – because mum was raised in the Catholic orphanage, my stepfather's Catholic.

Now, all of a sudden, at this age, I'm starting to learn about the Catholic religion, and I'm not liking it. I'm hating it because it doesn't make sense to me. It's already stored in my brain about, you know, the cosmos and, you know, like, the stars, the planets, the earth, the water – because I'm salt water and fresh water – and all of that sort of stuff. This is not making sense that this – these people dressed up in these queer-looking clothes are going – this is what it looked like to me as a child. They're walking around in really weird-looking stuff, holding on to stupid-looking things that don't make any sense to me. And those big crosses and, you know, the stained windows and all the rest of it were quite horrific for me to look at. You know, this man carrying the cross, and then next minute he's hanging from it. I find it all really, really traumatising through that lens because there's nothing nice about it. Like, we're talking about, you know, basic murder and suicide here. Like, it just – yes, no, too much. Didn't like it. I even used to pass out in church. So yes. So that was at Sale. I went to a bad state school there, though, and then when I was in grade 5, I – so mum had two more children – one when I was nine, one when I was 11 – so that made me happy, but then I used to get into trouble all the time because I'd tell them, like, stories about – you know, stories I'd been grown up because they're stories.

I used to get into trouble for it because I – “You're talking like my mother”, you know, like – because nan had me so much, and then that jealousy thing about stolen gen, and my mother – that, and I'd be like – and even though mum was a beautiful person, that used to hurt my feelings, like, because if I'm like her, then this – does she actually hate me or resent me? You know, but it was never – it was never that, but, as a child, that's what I felt. So yeah, I was basically told I wasn't allowed to tell the kids these stories, but they've got just as much black Aboriginal blood in them as what I have, so – and they love it. They – like, it's different. Like, they embrace – they love their culture and all that sort of stuff.

Then we moved to Melton, and in Melton it was even more isolating. I went to school with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and that, so now we had some Aboriginal people in town, you know, that I sort of – I kind of, like, knew, so that was a little bit better, but you still couldn't, like, really talk about it, and a lot of us didn't tell our friends until we got older that we were even Aboriginal. We just never mentioned it. And I remember some dancers coming to

the school. Once a year, they'd bring in dancers and stuff like that, and I'd be so excited, ready to, you know, watch the dance, the song, whatever was going to be – they were going to be doing for the – I don't know, they must have had some cultural component or something. But all that I would hear would be the kids going, "You black bastards. Youse are all on the dole. Get out of here. We don't want you at our school", blah, blah, blah, blah. And then I'd find myself getting into fights with people that disrespect and, you know, all of that kind of stuff, and these people have taken the trouble to come, and why are you thinking like that? But that was the mentality that was in the eighties. It was still as rife as ever.

And so that was the school days, and then I went on, like, was going back home more often because my whole intention was to run away from home and go back home. I didn't want to stay in Melton. So that was another thing. I just wanted to run away all the time. So imagine – I could imagine kids that were actually in care, why they want to run, because you just do. And it wasn't till I was about 15 I started to settle down a little bit more. 15 is when – that's when I met my husband – my husband now – when I was 15, and I started to settle down a little bit – a lot more. And he used to come with me up there and all that sort of stuff, and he really embraced it all. And he's also embraced it for the children and all that sort of stuff, but – and encouraged them, you know, to be included. But living in Melton, that was out in the west, and still today is still not like the north. Everything is in the north.

DENISE SWEET: All the services are in the north. All the – all those path cutters and those amazing people that got all those services up and started more than 40 years ago. I think VAHS is coming up to 50 years, isn't it? I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER: Not sure.

DENISE SWEET: Yep. But yeah. But none of that, and it was also a bit difficult in the earlier days to – even if you were wanting to go over there, like, to be involved because you lived out in the west, you weren't known, and plus you're from a different state.

DENISE SWEET: It's very different today. The way it all looks is so different today. Everyone's welcome. Everyone's, you know, but it's still – it's still not good enough out in the west. There's not enough services out in the west considering, in the western districts, the amount of prisons that we've got, and what community are they coming out into to wrap them around for cultural safety? I just worry about that. And especially if they were – they're not all from Victoria; they're from everywhere. We're all from everywhere because we were moved off country, and we moved and moved and moved. Like, but we also know where we're from. But yeah, I do worry about that. You've got all those prisons out in Deer Park Women's Prison to Port Phillip, Ravenhall, MRC.

There's four. And then in Geelong you've got that new – I can't remember what it's called. It's a sex offenders unit there – new one. And then you've got – I can't remember what it's called – well, Barwon and – starts with M. Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. But there we have at least seven prisons in the western area that is full to the brim of our mob, and it really concerns me that they're not getting the right supports and services. And what worries me more is their release. Are they

being released to – you know, have they got a home? Have they got – you know, a lot of them were kids in care. Have they got a home? Have they got food? Or are the drug dealers out there waiting for them, you know what I mean, the minute they get out that door?

So, they are very vulnerable, so they'll have all the good intentions but when they get out, they just – it's almost like they – yeah. I have been involved in organising one man's release from prison and - with a care team, actually two, but one I remember in particular was getting released and I organised and planned it all and everything like that to get him on country straight away as soon as he was released.

Being on country - I sent two men with him and I think that was the best thing, and then also knowing that he had somewhere to go to because of the care team and everyone involved when he got home, and he's done really, really well. He's stayed out of jail and he was just through this revolving door. So, that's one success story that I – I love.

INTERVIEWER: Was that when you worked at Link-Up or where were you working then?

DENISE SWEET: No. I was working in the Royal Commission at the time. So, there's layers - there's, like I said, there's layers of whatever happened to people while they're in that – the care too. Like, so yeah, I did 16 successful reunions – no, 17 sorry, successful reunions at Link-Up where I brought family together. Sometimes from four different States because children were removed anywhere and everywhere.

So, one I remember doing, and when I researched it, she – a lady in Melbourne had written a letter saying: "I'd like to – I'd like to – I'd like to get a two-year-old Aboriginal girl to get the four-year-old one company that I adopted." So, this – this woman thought that she was from Victoria and because there's a certain name that she that was quite Aboriginal but I don't know that was her adopted parents, I don't know why she thought that, but she thought she was from Victoria.

But researching it up, taking me to the Northern Territory and the (indistinct) in homes and there was evidence of her being in there, and then we stumbled upon this letter, I was horrified when I read it. That, you know, just ordering a child and then you find – I found her brother and he – he said when he was four - her real brother. They were walking along with his sister in the pram and the cops just come and nabbed her and he said my mother died that day, she fell on the road and she died that day. She didn't die, but she died.

DENISE SWEET: It took - took her (indistinct) to this woman in Melbourne, you know, what's his (indistinct) sounds like buying something off eBay or something, like it's just absolutely disgusting. She didn't know who she was, where she's from. So, her dad was from Arnhem land and her mum was from the Daly River. So, quite spiritual people and she was having these nightmares, but they were callings. We worked it out, they were callings and that's another thing in the mental health space. I'm getting sick to death of the word mental health, when a lot of these things are

spiritual experiences and even our own mob are doing it now, the mental health team, I'm getting sick of it.

It's just – it's just – I don't know, they need to name it something else because in their brains, they think they're dealing with people that have got mental health and – and it, like a lot of it, it's - you know, or that person's not (indistinct) back here because they got really, you know, heightened hyper-vigilant, which is what I would call it, hyper-vigilant, and it's the trauma talking.

DENISE SWEET: So, I like to wait until the trauma comes out, like because - and then you've got the person – you've got their attention. But we're starting to put these walls up more and more because of this whole mental health thing that no one's acknowledging. There's the actual – they can talk it, but they don't acknowledge it or realise that it actually really is the trauma that you're talking to when someone's really stressed out because they don't know how to communicate any other way and it's a process, it's a process that's got to be worked on, like it's a process that we've got to work with our mob on.

It can't just stop overnight. Yes, we don't like people yelling and screaming and, you know, these ads on tv don't talk to your mental health workers like this or whatever, but unless they're gonna punch you or something like that, the words – and you acknowledge to someone straight away, that's your trauma talking, are you okay? They calm. But you say, "Well, you can get out and come back next week when you've - " And I've heard a lot of this and I'm over it. When you're more, you know, civil and all this sort of stuff.

I really - why are we doing that to our mob? I don't understand it. And it's their trauma talking. When it's beyond that, yes I can understand it's a whole another level, or someone has got schizophrenia or bipolar or whatever they need meds for, but there's also this layer of spirituality and – and then this other layer of inter-generation trauma, vicarious trauma. Trans-generational – it's just, you know, it's – it's so intense and they don't even understand themselves, why they're behaving like that.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

DENISE SWEET: They haven't had the education, they've had lack of opportunity and a lot of – All's they wanted, especially stolen genal's, all's they wanted was love, like someone to love them so that – most of the time you'll see that they had children young, they were married young or in toxic relationships, you know, that's where their domestic violence, family violence and all that sort of stuff comes into it. But I still don't think that we're – we're quite a bit of a way off the mark from healing our mob, a very long way off it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

DENISE SWEET: Because we're running with models that we know don't work. That it's all a tick a box and – and we also need the freedom to be able to work it our way. The way that we know that works, without the pressure of these KPIs and all

that sort of stuff because KPIs, to me, written by white, you know, funding bodies or whatever, do not capture the actual work that's been done with someone.

Doesn't capture it but that's how you've got to do 15 calls, you've got to do this, you've got to do that, and as long as that's done and it's ticked, they're fine. But in actuality, if you're – if you're ticking boxes and, oh yeah, I made 15 calls today, but where's it been captured whether those calls were effective? Whether they – they - they resolved the issue, whether they were healing to the person, whether it was, you know, like – like I said, effective, working, meaningful.

DENISE SWEET: I just – I – and it's just across the board and a lot of workers are getting burnt out, good workers are getting burnt out because of this, having to fix – fit the mould, still having to fit into a white system to heal our mob. Yet, I sit there and tick a box and say, yeah, I rang such and such. Yeah, well, were you on the phone for five minutes? Were you on the phone for half an hour? Were you on the phone for three hours? 'Til they got it all out and you listened to them, and you listened to them well.

And then from that, you took down – worked it out, all the referrals that you need to do, all the advocacy that you need to do, all the – and that's how I work but it's getting more and more frustrating with the KPIs and all of that sort of stuff, constantly trying to justify yourself. It's like trying to put square pegs in round holes, but still, it's not working. Our incarceration levels are still up higher than ever. The removal of our children is still higher than ever. Our removals are still as high as ever and (indistinct) our stolen gens, the recommendations are constantly still too late. Like, the Bringing them Home Report, all recommendations should have been filled out before the Royal Commission ended. Mental health, the Royal Commission into, you know, child sexual abuse, the Bringing them Home Report had an address that – that that should happen a long time ago and it's only – so, to me, it's a long waste of government funds. Most of the people that I work with tell me:

“Youse just waiting for us to die, so then youse don't have to worry about it anymore, you don't have to keep putting us and making us retell our story, re-trigger us.”

Dah, dah, dah, and so much mistrust, so much mistrust and they know that we've got to tick a box because they tell you, “What are you here for, because you actually want to see me, or you've got to tick a box today?” So, I'm here and even that, in itself, is causing trauma for mob. So, I don't know what we do but we've got to do something and we've got to do it fast because our Elders are dying in droves.

We're not capturing their stories as well as we could be and – and the knowledge, the knowledge is not still getting taken notice of. Even right down to fire burning, it's like, the Northern Territory never have bush fires like we have and that's because mob managed the land still and we keep telling them and telling them and telling them and, “Oh, yes, that sounds like a great idea.” And they'll promote it like all this fancy stuff on – on tv about our – our mob and how they can look after land and manage land and all the rest of it, but then they don't do it.

You're still driving around with long grasses and – so, environmentally, they've got to start listening. And about our ecosystems that are all dying off because it's happening and it's happening at a faster rate now. You've got to listen to the people and what the stories are and also our mob need to start (audio drop). I know as workers, we've worked –

INTERVIEWER: The sound – the sounds just played up a little bit. Maybe you had your hand on the speaker, I'm unsure.

DENISE SWEET: Is that better?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Yeah. It might have just been the – the way you were holding it. So, sorry, what was that last bit? The young ones, what do the young ones need to do?

DENISE SWEET: The young ones. Did you hear me talking about the ecosystems and all that stuff?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DENISE SWEET: Yes. Okay. So, it's more – it's more governments and all that sort of stuff, we need to, you know, listen. Not just listen, but actually action it about our fire management systems and our ecosystems because it's not – it's not working. I mean, we're starting to do it, but it should be everybody's business, not – it should be everybody's business not just our business, you know what I mean? Like, we all live on this land and it's everybody's business to be taking care of it and all that sort of stuff and that's the stage that it's got to.

And we're – like, community also need to listen to our allies and not be rude to them, you know, the ones that are really advocating for this stuff and I'm finding them a little bit less because us as workers, we're fine, but the – the community can sometimes be, you know, here we go again because of their past experiences with non-Aboriginal people. They're not – or they're allies or, you know, but like I said, we've had allies for a very long time but not to the extent that we do now. Like, I was telling you, my grandfather -

DENISE SWEET: - his family, they were allies. Going way back, he had allies all along. Otherwise, we wouldn't have had a referendum for voting and win it. So, they've always been there but it's been rules set in place to make it socially awkward. The other thing with racism, I get sick to death and that's probably the same topic for everyone else. You know, "You're not black enough to be Aboriginal. You're not Aboriginal."

People that you've met for (indistinct) "You're not Aboriginal." Well, I am and I always have been and I even denied it like, I'm not just all of a sudden coming out the closet. It's like, you've met my family, you know what I mean? Like, they - but they're Aboriginal, you're not. I'm like, well, if they're Aboriginal, then how come I'm not? They're my biological family. So, yeah. I get sick of that, yeah, and sometimes even with mob they get, you know, they get a little bit confused.

Not so much these days, but in the earlier days there was suspicion because, you know, the fair skin. And I get so – there's just stories - so many stories where, you know, the white man or the white woman falls in love with the Aboriginal man, vice versa, and both their families disown them because – because the Aboriginal family doesn't like – and that's been transferred down, that has so transferred down, you know, as a trauma, and as something that has silenced someone.

That they're, you know, probably not so much the younger ones, but it'll silence them because, you know, mum's white, dad's black, you know, like this is the whole thing that, you know, the reality is they love each other and there's lots of places where assimilation has worked on all of us, and the assimilation policies.

DENISE SWEET: So, getting back to the injustices and that over-representation of the – the child protection system. It really does need an overhaul and in the overhaul, it doesn't need white – more white people sitting there working out what the overhaul looks like, and it shouldn't also be an Aboriginal organisation necessarily running it – running it to – to DHS standards.

We are getting guardianship of children and things like that through some of our services but at the same time I think it needs a yarn around the table. But Aboriginal people - and one of my personal opinions about it is, is really looking at the story, looking at why women report domestic violence. Is it being – like so, the whole police system right from the start, everything. Looking at why people are – yeah, reporting domestic violence.

And that basically, the person's probably taking more than what they should of in the first place, or a lot longer than what they should have in the first place before they even had the guts to go and report it and that's what I see a lot and then – then the mother gets investigated and the whole wide (indistinct) is to take the child away and why are they not listening at the first point of call and dealing with it?

So, nothing's changed in the respect of when a woman – it hasn't changed. A woman reports domestic violence and they want to take a child. No. What about the mother? Does she need support? This is how I think. We need to sit around as Aboriginal people and talk about it and our Aboriginal men as well; they've lost their place through colonisation. They've lost their place; it was taken from them. So, their manhood and their roles and responsibilities are completely ripped from them.

So, today they don't even know what that looks like, what it is that they're supposed to do culturally. And – and the drugs and alcohol have gotten worse and worse and worse. So, when a mother is protecting their child, but they're asking for help to get out, where is the help? What is it? What are the processes? What are the blocks? What's stopping them, you know, from getting that support? And why are they continuously being judged and not helped instead? What about the hands? What about the hands from the community to help as well and step up?

What about the hands from the organisations that crush the women's spirit and their souls from these removals and stuff? And as we see, as evidence from past history – if you look at the mothers, where their kids were taken, they've died shortly after the

removals taken place. With no support, no anything and we're still – and it's still going on. Like, I don't – what things have got better? But once again, it's always, under resourced, underfunded and people burn out too from - from the whole entire system, the people that are working in it.

And I'll get back to my original point, it's again about KPIs stats, putting square pegs into round holes and it's not working and something really, seriously has to be done about it. Not with (indistinct) I mean children – people can die from this, from the police not listening. And we hear it all the time and then people start up charities and that sort of stuff, but what actually changes? So – or there's too many cases that get closed, where the child clearly should not be there.

They get closed off and during - my daughter-in-law's a schoolteacher, during Covid, reports were made about a lot of kids not being fed and because at the schools, they know the kids that aren't getting fed, aren't getting looked after at home properly and all that kind of stuff. So, they tend to, out of the kindness of their own heart, feed kids before they go home to make sure that they got plenty of food, out of their own pockets. So, it seems like a lot of money is getting spent into the child protection system but what the prevention – the prevention in the first place is by listening, you know, the prevention's by listening what is going on.

Not just for the child but for the mother, for this person, that person, understanding the family as a whole because that's how we roll as Aboriginal people. It's us, it's our family, it's our community, it's – that's – that's what it should look like to feel, you know, completely and utterly safe. But too much gets invaded into those – what – our safe spaces as well or people that get brought in. So, I don't understand by the person committing the - the violence against women or violence against men, because I've seen both.

People continue to get away with it and – and aren't being heard right from the beginning, right from point a and, yeah, and – and not helped. Like, does it really hurt to go out and see someone and be effective? Like, oh, they didn't do their dishes, or they didn't do this, or they didn't do that. Wouldn't it be more effective for the person to come and help do the dishes or, you know, get a carer or something that helps them a little bit until they get back on their feet, emotionally, spiritually, physically from a domestic violence situation? Rather than someone going off to write reports about them, make them feel even worse about themselves and that kind of stuff.

So, anyway, that - that's something that really bugs me and it's around you all the time, it's around you every day, you're hearing from community, "Oh, my grandchild come in my care last night." Or, "This one come in my care last night." Or, you know, or, "We've got nowhere to put this particular child." And then for me, I've had phone calls about family – kids within my own family that they're in Sydney.

I don't – I don't know these children and they might be – they might be already, by the time they ring you, in a placement for 12, 18 months and if you went to take that child then you would be thinking that then the parents wouldn't get access, you know what I mean? Because they're coming to hold you for the State.

DENISE SWEET: So, you're thinking about your cousins and all that sort of stuff and about their accesses and even the potential that they may get their child back.

INTERVIEWER: So, you've done Kinship caring before?

DENISE SWEET: I worked in Kinship Care.

DENISE SWEET: So, VACCA, but I have – I'm down in Link-Up New South Wales, a part of the childcare agency as well now and so I have had lots of phone calls. But the only thing I can do for any of those kids is provide them with their family tree. Like, put it in their file so that they grow up knowing who they are. There's one good program now that I'm really happy that's started up, and it's working really good, is the Kinship Finding. VACCA's running it and it's a really good program so that their family history and trees are already done.

To not growing up having to go to somewhere like Link-Up to find out where's their family, who are they? And all that sort of stuff. The cultural support plans are one thing but now this Kinship Finding now and they've got their family trees in their files. I think is – is going to be like a – a preventative from the kids growing up not knowing who they are, or potential marrying a cousin. Because they don't know it's their cousin or, you know, that thing that happens when family don't know who they are or – or who their apical ancestors are, like it's their – it's not just your immediate family, it's that whole, where I started at the beginning of this yarn, comes right back to your apical ancestors.

Like, for me, it comes from genealogy. So, you would have to look at your family tree to make sure, you know, that you didn't get in the relationship and it's a really big issue for every – all of us, really big issues, it's issues for who, you know, we could have potentially married, who our kids could have potentially married. The shame that if it's in your history, that there was first cousins that got married. Yeah. It is a really big, a big issue. So, yeah.

Something else I was going to – the other thing I wanted to yarn about is - this happened last week, and I got really frustrated by it, it's – so, I'm a family therapist, I did my training through Bouverie and La Trobe University whilst I was working at Link-Up and I've noticed it a lot. So, I wanted to do counselling as an independent Aboriginal counsellor. So, I was told that I have to have - this is through the reparation scheme, and I want to talk a bit more about the reparation scheme a little bit after that as well, this is a personal thing.

So, I was told by a non-Aboriginal person that I need to be – to be able to do this, I need to be able to – my degree's not enough and my grad' cert'. I've got to have a membership with APRA or any of these places. The thing is, even though I'm at a level eight in education, I was never told when I did my course which was done with one Aboriginal person and one non-Aboriginal person, we all did it through that way, you know, like studied that way.

So, these things get funded for education and all that sort of stuff but then they don't support you to get enrolled in these - you know, so that you can work like any other family therapist, in a – you know, by yourself with an ABN number and, you know, all that kind of stuff. So, there's blockages all – all the way through. So, I've rang La Trobe, I've rang the Bouverie centre who've been running this course for a really long time. I finished it more that ten years ago, and one's telling me that the other one's responsible for it.

You're on hold for an hour or so each time you're trying to ring people to get the answers that – because APRA and CASPA and all those other places that you have memberships to be able to work on your own, are not accepting or acknowledging these courses, and they're saying we have to have evidence of your supervision hours and all that sort of stuff, and signed off and this kind of stuff. And we were never told any of that in the first place. So, I get really frustrated about the amount of education that we constantly have to have all the time.

But then it's not followed through, they're quite happy to take the funding, but then it's not followed through to help us to take that next step. And then that next step and – and I'm really, really angry and upset about that because now I'm having to backtrack on something that was more than 10 years ago. I can't get a membership unless I go back to all the people that have worked – I've worked for, and get them to fill in all this information and how do you do that? They're working – we're already under-resourced in our orgs.

How do you go back to all these people who are – and make them write all that stuff like, 10 years later? So, I'm really, really angry about that and I think that universities need to be accountable more in not just helping us get our educations, but to be better than that. Like, to be able to be enrolled in these things that other people are aware of, that we were never told in our sources. Yet, we've got exactly the same qualifications. So, I'm really – I think it's just a gammon way of grabbing hold of funding to - just to roll it out and get it over and done with.

INTERVIEWER: And for their reconciliation action plan.

DENISE SWEET: And educate us so we can just get on with looking after our mob but not empowering us to be able to, you know, work as an Aboriginal therapist, as an individual. So, I was very overwhelmed and I was very angry, and all that sort of stuff when I found out that I had to do all this to be able to – because I wanted to do some work for all the clients that I've worked with and I've counselled for the last 12 years or so.

They're all asking for me to do the counselling, and I've always worked as cultural counsellor as well, healing and counselling. And I'm really frustrated that I can't help them because – because the Department of Justice are running the stolen gen' reparations program. So, I – I was involved when I was working at Ngarra Jarranounith, which was after the Royal Commission. We rolled out the redress component of the – the sexual abuse claims, which was the redress scheme, we called it Ngarra Jarranounith which means heal, restore and remedy.

So, I was cultural healer and counsellor for that as well and I supported all those people that didn't – that came through Link-Up's doors in the days when there was no – nowhere to put them when they wanted to disclose their (indistinct) sexual abuse. So, I was able to support all them once again, on the next part of their journey. So, there was – I think it was good because there was a lot of consistency and familiarity and like not re-traumatising people because you already knew the story, so it was more streamlined. And that's what I wanted seamless transitions for people to be able to tell their story without, you know, no dramas.

So, when the reparations come out and they did the community consultations, I went across the State with my team. Ngarra Jarranounith went across the State with Connecting Homes so that they could understand, because community were getting confused between redress and reparations, that's why they ended up with two different names. Because one's for sexual abuse and the other is – and they're entitled to both under their own guidelines. One's – one's a national scheme and the other one's just a State one.

But it went to every community – for every community consultation to listen to grassroots community talk about their experiences and what they wanted this reparations to look like. They had facilitators that - each of them, that were capturing it all and putting it into reports and feeding it back to government and I would, you know, like I said, I'd explain it. So, I heard everything from grassroots community all across the State, what they wanted. And I was hearing things like one-stop-shop where the (indistinct) having to join that organisation and that organisation and that organisation, to be able to do our stolen gen' stuff.

You know, we have to join the tufts to get our tree, we have to join Link-Up to get our whatever, we have to go to Ngarra Jarranounith to get our sexual abuse stuff done, we have to go to Connecting Homes and Link-Up to do our reparations. You know, whatever, but the thing is - I mean the thing is, this is what they wanted; a one-stop-shop, they wanted a – an easy transition into it. Like - and alls I'm seeing, and even Uncle Jack Charles went off about it and was sarcastic about it when he won Elder of the year – was it last year or the year before?

When the scheme rolled out the Department of Justice have taken it over, they've turned it into bureaucratic system. It's causing further trauma, people haven't got the supports that they need. They're ringing me up and they're not – but then I haven't got the support because of this whole other drama with having to be an independent person to do the counselling.

So, they're having to go to mainstream workers for the 35 hours of counselling, or whatever it is, to deal with this stuff. And the Bringing Them Home work is across the State, have not got the capacity to be doing all of this as well as on top of family history research, running groups, because they're only one person in an org. And that was some of the concerns because all the Bringing Them Home workers were in attendance in their areas and this stuff.

So, they – right from the beginning – so, it's turned out looking nothing like what community asked for and Daniel Andrews said that he was going to let the community – it was going to be for the people and directed by the people, and it's

not. It's been run by Department of Justice, it's got tangled up in a bureaucratic system, it's causing people anxiety, the level of proof is really hard because the Koorie Heritage Trust Family History unit only have three workers and they've got to do the entire State and they are run off their feet all the time anyway let alone, do you know what I mean?

INTERVIEWER: Yes

DENISE SWEET: Now Link-Up are run off their feet, they don't have enough workers for this, and the regions just can't – can't keep up with it with their end. And also, orgs don't have – a lot of orgs don't all have the authority to do certificates of Aboriginality. And that is a really big issue in community, especially when they're known in community, they've lived in community, they've been in care of the state government and all that sort of stuff, and then they're going back to the state government to get their justice, and they're having to prove who the hell they are.

Like, it's – it's just - really makes me angry and then it – it's made me – the extra layer of anger has come that now people – all the things that I've tried to prevent, people retelling their stories, being retraumatised, retriggered, it's all happening all over again, but this time there's lack of supports. They say that they've got counselling, but they're just sending them off to mainstream people, people that don't know them. And that's, I guess, why I got extra more angry about this course with La Trobe and that because there's nothing I can do to help them.

And I know their stories, you know what I mean? I know where they're at in their journey and it's, for me, it's been really frustrating, and it's been very, very frustrating for the Victorian community in how this has been rolled out and ran. Like I said, and when you've got Uncle Jack Charles, you know, getting phone calls from – he was one of the first. He got a phone call from them to get him to justify who he was by a non-Aboriginal person working him in the Department of Justice. And then (indistinct) do it Uncle Jack – Jack – Uncle Jack had a voice; God bless his soul.

And he was making a mockery out of it at the NAIDOC event when he won Elder of the year. He goes, "Oh, I won Elder of the year but, you know, apparently I – I got to justify who I am." Like, he was just really – you wouldn't have noticed unless you knew the story but, yeah. So, we got him who's got a voice, do you know, more of a voice than anyone else. But then you've got these people that haven't got confidence, a lot of people can't read or write. It's assumed that our mob can read and write but they don't think it through stolen gen'. What educational opportunities did they have, do you know what I mean?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

DENISE SWEET: Like, what – you know, can they read or write? There's all these assumptions that are made by mainstream people and they don't realise the impacts that it has on us as workers, because we know who can read and write, who can't, and there's no – there's no shaming in it, but there should not be an assumption that everybody can read and write.

And just - or, that everybody's got the financial capacity to be able to have a computer and upload it to ww. whatever. The Elders don't have access to that. A lot of our kids don't have access to the technical – the way that technology is evolving, the poverty and all that kind of stuff is – is just not supporting them and I – I think that needs to be looked at as well.

INTERVIEWER: Well, economic disadvantage is one of the things that were on the list as well. So –

DENISE SWEET: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: - if there's anything else you want to talk about there.

DENISE SWEET: Economic disadvantage it's just, you know, the way that, especially at the moment, the way the prices are going up. The amount of grandparents that have got their grandkids in their care.

INTERVIEWER: And often they're not getting any payments for them or anything -

DENISE SWEET: No.

INTERVIEWER: - because they're just, you know, trying to stay out of the system. Yeah. So -

DENISE SWEET: Yes. So, they're trying to spread the money really thin across the family to try and feed everyone and get meals on the table and electricity. All of our Elders are getting their electricity and, you know, anyone that's, you know, on, you know, a payment of any sorts is just not making it, it's not matching the cost of living at all.

And, I mean, during Covid I was able to do shops and that for people online and get it delivered to them and things like that and that was a good thing and I think that's – I think we need a bit more of that. And, you know, not, oh I've got a list of things, do you know what I mean? Go – go to Saint thingy – to Paul's. Go here, go there. Why can't we just have our own? You know, I know a lot of orgs do food share and things like that but that – like, when things like Covid hit it was impossible for anyone to get out and go get food. They needed it delivered to them. And sometimes even now, in the middle of the night if the grandmother gets a baby, how is she meant to go out and get her groceries and that kind of stuff? And yeah, but the – the financial situation is really bad at the moment and money is being spread really thinly.

People are living without electricity, hot water, you know, and let alone, you know, a school puts the pressure on them to say, "Oh well, your kids needs an iPad or a laptop to be able to do their homework otherwise they're going to fail." We're looking at real, big issues coming up again. Like, really, like it's happening. Really big issues financially for our mob and, like I said, and we cannot expect to know that all Elders can read and write or even that they're in a – in the state of mind or in a situation where they can get to a library to get on a computer, and learn all about it and, you know, all this – all this kind of thing.

So, I just – this whole Department of Justice thing and the way they’re running this reparation scheme – again I’m thinking it’s all about KPIs and all that sort of stuff, it’s not about peoples welfare or – or, you know, or even listening to them on the phone. “No, you don’t fit this, this, this, or this so that’s it. End of story.” You know, and they more or less end the conversation leaving mob traumatised.

DENISE SWEET: So, the thing is - is they’re abused by system, and now they have to go back to be compensated by the very same system that stuffed their lives up and all the rest of it because they thought they were going to be better parents than what their parents were, and they wanted to be the parents of these kids. But if they’re the parents of the kids, then why the hell do they – don’t know that these kids can’t read or write as adults now?

Like, they’re the parents, they’re the ones that have got the records, they’re the ones that wanted the guardianship orders and all the rest of it to have those kids, or adopt them out, forcibly remove them with adoption and stuff like that with - against the parent or the mother’s wish.

And – and then they end up back in the system so many – so much of that happened, they end up back in the system and to think that Link-Up don’t get the right supports, the Koorie Family History unit which I know only to have three of deadliest most dedicated workers that have been there 20 plus years that work – will work ‘til 11, 12 o’clock at night to get things done for people. They should be a team of eight.

DENISE SWEET: You know, especially at this time for the level of proof of what the Department of Justice are requiring. I just think it’s – I just think it’s really wrong and – and not only – some – some of the orgs not in – if it’s sort of like less than a 50 per cent ratio of Aboriginal people working in the org, then there’s a really big imbalance.

DENISE SWEET: That needs to be addressed as well because, you know, you can have managers that are non-Aboriginal that don’t understand that you need to just go and you’ve got to go now. You know, you don’t have time to log on to this and book a car, and book this, and book that, and justify this, this, and this, a couple of hours’ worth of work. Because such and such down the road could be very, very suicidal at the moment and you know you have to get there and you have to get there fast to do the intervention.

So, that kind of stuff really frustrates me as well. Like, it really – and it’s getting worse. “No, you can’t go there, you can’t do this.” So, there’s a lot of ways in which the way that we practice our business isn’t being acknowledged. You know, and the way that it’s prioritised is not the way that you - you would prioritise the workload in your mind of how best to support somebody and what is a priority too.

And my priorities are not getting together with a team and celebrating with a cake or whatever, some taking a stick thing just because it’s an event that you have to tick off

a list. My – you know, I would rather go and deal with that person up the road right now, in my own car if that's what it takes, or run there to support them, to support community at grassroots level.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DENISE SWEET: And that's – that's just me. And I'm finding it harder and harder to be able to because of all these blocks, and not being told things, and all that kind of stuff. Like, the education I was just talking about, like to be able to work culturally my style. Yes. And, yeah, it's – it is, it's really frustrating, I don't know how best to describe it.

INTERVIEWER: I understand it completely.

DENISE SWEET: Yes. I really don't but something's gotta give and – and the ones that have got the trust by the community and all the rest of it and – and are trustworthy people, do you know what I mean? They're not going to steal, they're not going to pinch, they're not going to – it's all about good intentions, is, to me, is the right way of working from the heart, working from the heart. Because mob will call you out on your b-s.

DENISE SWEET: They really will, they'll be the first one to call you out on your b-s. So – so if they trust you, why are we letting organisations like the Department of Justice create bureaucracies for our mob? I'm sure there's good workers in there and all that sort of stuff but I'm just – I'm just really upset that what I heard, in the months that we travelled around, as opposed to what's being rolled out, are two different things.

And I'm not seeing the orgs that – that help these people, being topped up in any way, shape or form to be able to provide the service for them. Yet they are the ones providing the service for them because they're not getting support from the Department of Justice, they're getting sent off to mainstream organisations or counsellors, where they're going to have to start their story from the beginning because they're not going to quite get the narrative at the start of the conversation. So – so, again, they're feeling like they're educating mainstream society again with their story that's traumatic and they can't just be in that story and heal from it. So, that's – that's where I feel very passionate about. Continuity for our stolen gens', continuity – we took self-determination, well, you know, if a – I believe in self-determination but how can we do it if these systems and structures keep pulling away from us?

And, you know – you know, like our education models like how much – how much more education do we want when we're already educated at work and with our own mob in the first instance anyway without the education. Like – but even if you've got it, then it's – you're still not good enough too and they're not getting the continuity that constancy, the supports.

And how often – I even hear of parents or carers, Aboriginal carers, saying that a kid has had, you know, 20 caseworkers in one year. Well, how is that helping that kid? People leave because they get burnt out because they're – we're not sustaining an

Aboriginal workforce, to be able to work culturally appropriate, the way that we do business. Yes. And I can't emphasise that enough because that's where they're going wrong, all the time.

DENISE SWEET: So, yes. So, and, like I said, domestic violence needs a real big overhaul. We keep talking about and the funding keeps getting rolled out to rolled out, and rolled out, but how effective is it? What's it doing? Is it working? How do they capture that? Rather than, I made 10 phone calls this week, you know what I mean? Like, how are they capturing that the works been effective, and that the person's feeling supported, the person's feeling safe?

The person's got enough money to be able to get from one – is the person got somewhere to live? And are they in the right state of mind to be able to look for somewhere to live at the moment, you know, because they haven't got, you know, a rich old aunty or uncle that they can go borrow the money off to – 'til they get back on their feet.

DENISE SWEET: They just don't. It's not there, it's not available. Anyway, that's how I feel about it all. It's just like lack of funding our services appropriately and then – and the work being done effectively, and no one does it better than what we do in our own orgs. But I will say, at times, it is very frustrating, the nepotism that can be happening in organisations, and that can feel unsafe at times for a non-Aboriginal people, if not for other Aboriginal people from other areas. Yes. So, yes.

INTERVIEWER: You don't have to answer, but if you could make any recommendations, what would you think would be the most important, like hypothetically, if you could make some?

DENISE SWEET: If I could make some recommendations, I would say in terms of stolen generation, I would say the consistency, the continuity and having more Aboriginal people, even though they're all identified positions, but being more supported at this current moment. Like, to me, that's vital because it's really traumatising the hell out of everybody.

DENISE SWEET: Just looking at – over – looking at the prison system and doing stuff that's meaningful and, you know, implementing things that's going to helpful to that person, individualising things a little bit more, and not a one size fits all approach to our mob. Because there's different cultures, Melbourne's a land of many clans and – and every, you know, inclusion for everybody and everybody's different. Yes. So, more individualised supports, more supports given to mothers in raising healthy booris, healthy, happy, booris.

And I'll give you one more example, I had to run a parenting group many years ago and I went and run the parenting group but I had to follow this program, whatever it was, that you did and it was just another tick-a-box thing. We roll this out, we tell the people this, and then – yeah, it's written up really well and very articulately and, you know, it's got all the artwork on it, it looks beautiful, but the actuality is, it would have been more worth just going to their houses and giving them a hand and

helping them and showing them how to do – like, role modelling, skills that needed to be implemented individually for those people than sitting them all in a group, because it all becomes about the free lunch, too.

It doesn't become about the – the actuality of what we're talking about, it's not being heard. So, it's just a waste of time because actions speak louder than words. And if you're present and you're willing to go to give someone a hand, they're more likely to respond to it than what they are sitting in a group with their other friends, trying to be class clowns and this, this, what else. And, you know, just coming to have lunch and it's just, yeah. I don't think it's effective.

So, I'd recommend a real change in the way that we work with our mob, a real change. An empowering change to work with young mothers and not against them, unless they're really bad, like it's, you know, child is at risk of death or whatever but it's – it's because the mother hasn't got the skills, then teach her, help her. And also, you know, keeping women more safe from men that – that - that harm. And keeping men safer from women that harm. And the police - I would say that there needs to be a lot more education for the police around that stuff and how important it is. And especially if you're with another Aboriginal. Say, an Aboriginal women is with an Aboriginal man, they don't understand that this can turn into - then turn into tribal wars which can turn into more violence outside of that immediate situation. And it would just escalate out of control. So, the police have got to understand this as well that if it's not dealt with at the first point of call, then families start working against families and the (indistinct) violence will start up, and that sort of stuff.

So, education is a key, education being supported too for our mob that are educating themselves, to be followed through to become, you know, if you're doing that course then yes. Don't – don't just leave people going to find out 10 years later that what they've got to do to become, you know, have a membership with their education. I'd just like recommendations for people never to assume that people can read or write. That our children – our children are growing up with the necessary gadgets or things that they need. And how's that going to work with the level of poverty?

To have the right education and the right tools and they feel no shame that they don't have it, you know what I mean, internet. Access to those things that kids need because that's the way our kids are getting educated now, at this time. More supports around exiting prison. Yes. Naming it, naming what the issues are when people get out of the prison. Like, we all say it, but it's not named in any sort of like formal report, that you know the drug dealers are going to be there waiting for them, and what could possibly go wrong when they get out? We all know it, but it's not written anywhere in text.

DENISE SWEET: And the importance of them getting on country to get stronger before they even – and someone waiting for them to – to get on country before they start getting back in the community and going back to old ways. Yes. Perpetuating the cycle. So, I'd like to see changes and another thing I'd like to see is, and it's probably - I'm being inspired by Beth Murray with that – is a stolen generation marker at every single council in the whole of Australia, not necessarily even at the councils somewhere.

Because if my grandfather likened it to being worse than on the frontline of world war two, then there should be recognition of the truth of the situation and somewhere where – somewhere sensory, where there's a belonging place for this mob. Like, this particular group of people, their families are descendants. So – and acknowledgment that they survived and for the kids that never come home.

Like, you know, people have experienced, they've known – stolen gen' have known that these kids – that never come home and every time I'll do like stand around the fire and do a healing circle, make sure that when we all put our, you know, our gum leaves in there that – that it's always mentioned at the end to – to – to remember those that never made it home, they never made it home. And that sometimes a part that gets missed and, yeah.

So, and I guess the understanding too, like the kinship arrangements, like I remember going to department once, listening to a case, they were doing an investigation on someone and they said:

“But they've got people staying there that – got people staying there because their house burnt down. So, there's about 10 people staying at their house. So, they can't have this kid anymore that they've got in their care. These are the carers.”

I said to the woman that was saying it, I said:

“So, you mean to say, if your cousin or your brother or your sister's house burnt down, you wouldn't let them come and stay at your house?”

Or, you know, and your – and you – and you would expect that your children would be removed? They're like, “Oh, no. No.” I said, “Well, what's the difference? What's the difference?” I said, “Anyway, I've got all these people staying at my place in the rumpus room at the moment.”

So – because I – I was supposed to be involved in this decision making and whether this child should be removed because those people had moved in, and only then 'til they got a new house. And that's – I just thought that that's what people do, they help each other.

DENISE SWEET: So, I couldn't quite believe why they were making such a big issue out of it and the big issues that they make out of everything. So, you know, and then when there is a big issue to deal with, they don't want to deal with it, falls on deaf ears.

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