

Kirrae Clarke: Hello, my name is Kirrae Clark. And my mob is Kirrae, we're on Gunditjmara Country.

What does Country mean to you?

Kirrae Clarke: Country means to me a place of belonging, a place of where one can feel at home feel, feel validation feel peace. But the word I'm looking for is, what Country makes me feel is right. And this is the problem with what's going on to all our young people. It's the lostness of country, which leads to substance abuse and criminal styles and lifestyles that aren't right, because of the loss of Country and the emptiness that leaves you with not being on Country, lots of loss of culture, loss of lots of things. And that is one of the biggest issues. I feel for Aboriginal people. In this day and age right now, especially, especially young people is definitely a big one. Country is all about wellbeing.

Can you think of any ways we can make that better?

Kirrae Clarke: Yeah, well, it's just about getting the young lads connected back to culture and country, definitely connecting back to Country and getting back into the culture and, and it's the small steps such as doing your little men's groups and all this, which are small steps, but are part of the bigger healing process. And you got to stay accountable and respect for your community and respect for your elders and respect for your ancestors.

What has happened to your mob and to Country because your land was taken?

Kirrae Clarke: Well, there's lots of things that has done but one of the biggest is substance abuse and alcoholism is a big, big, big part of why you why you have this now is because people wanting to get not connected to Country or culture. And so that leads you into big, big issues. And then now it's because you're not connected. You go down the wrong path. And then there's generational trauma. And that's the biggest problem with losing culture and not being connected to land.

What are some examples of good practices or programs happening on country that could be adopted more widely? What do you think could help this?

Kirrae Clarke: Yes, and there is lots of good stuff happening locally here in Southwest Victoria. So, the programs that have been set up, such as the cultural birds, looking after Country, sea and air, big steps forwards into fixing these issues and the big things into fixing these issues and the native title in 94, or giving back to land and having recognition over having a say over our Country and waterways and air spaces, starts off with good programs and practising traditional ways of practising traditional practices, you definitely help all these issues.

What does it feel like to be an Aboriginal person living in Victoria?

Kirrae Clarke: Well, it has its ups and downs, that's for sure. So yeah, it definitely has its ups and downs. But again, I guess it feels as though it's getting better. That's all I can say. Yes, it feels as though it's getting better.

What are the important things you want people to know about your experiences?

Kirrae Clarke: Well, I would say through my experiences, and I would definitely say the important thing is that Mother Nature looks after all of us, and that we have got to all understand that we cannot constantly take and not give something back.

What's does self-determination look like for you?

Kirrae Clarke: Self determination would look like self empowerment, self healing, self governance. And, and just your veins. Definitely back to back clean culture.

What changes would you like to see for your children and your grandchildren?

Kirrae Clarke: More of an acceptance, more of an understanding and empathy? Yes, empathy.

How could First Peoples History and Culture be better taught at school?

Kirrae Clarke: That is a tough one. But I feel as though a lot of it is already happening. Especially in the local schools. We have welcome to Country and that every day, I think it is every assembly so I think it is going in the right way. But having said that, there's great models in New Zealand where language is taught and practised so yeah, maybe a better way would be an actual better way would be more excursions to Country.

How could Aboriginal kids be better supported at school?

Kirrae Clarke: Yeah, a lot of mentoring children. The Victorian education system would have to implement things, that's a big one, collaboration, as in collaboration with school boards, and also school across Victoria, but having a lot of collaboration with Indigenous communities around Victoria.

Do you have any other suggestions about how else we could improve the Victorian education system First Peoples

Kirrae Clarke: Yeah, just like I say mentoring and having flexible systems because it's not set in the right structure. The right structure isn't right for Indigenous people to sit there for that long is their brain their brains are outside looking at the birds looking at Mother Nature looking at Country thinking about that stuff so you got to be flexible in understanding and saying when it's getting boring it can't be too structured.