



TRANSCRIPT OF SUBMISSION
MATTHEW LEEDER – 16 JANUARY 2024

Transcript Produced by
LAW IN ORDER PTY LIMITED

ACN 086 329 044

T: 1300 004 667

W: www.lawinorder.com.


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MATTHEW LEEDER: Hi, my name's Matthew Leeder. Um, I'm a proud Palawa on my father's side and Djadjawurrung on my mother's side. Man. Um, living on Djadjawurrung country. Um, I'm 40 years of age. And this is my story of, um, being
 5 in residential care. Uh, in 2005, I was 22 years of age and put into the care of the Lighthouse Foundation. During my time, there was had an amazing primary carer, but unfortunately, [REDACTED] requires respite time. Um, [REDACTED] was a corrections officer. [REDACTED] was. And [REDACTED] bore witness to, um, me coming home to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], [REDACTED] noted down and reported it to lighthouse. Uh, in 2005. In some in the summer. I
 10 don't remember the exact month, but I do remember it was the summertime. Myself and another resident, [REDACTED] [REDACTED], were taken to a private residence with four other gay men in attendance, and there was adult movies playing at that time. I was very a vulnerable young person, highly medicated. After witnessing the shooting of [REDACTED], uh, in in the [REDACTED]. Um, and had just recently detoxed from
 15 ketamine addiction prior to being put into having respite care from the supported program. Um, during that afternoon, we were we were taken to a private residence, [REDACTED] and I, where four other, um, gay males were in attendance watching pornography, and [REDACTED] and I were subjected to, um, men self-pleasuring each other, and I was forced whilst under the influence of alcohol.

20 **MATTHEW LEEDER:** Um, to be involved in those incidents. Um, upon returning home, uh, reported it to [REDACTED] immediately. [REDACTED] took notes. Um, and put a formal report into lighthouse. That carer was removed from the program immediately. Uh, and [REDACTED], um, was soon after removed from lighthouse as a
 25 carer, uh, because [REDACTED] was accused of not being qualified enough to be able to report such incidents. No follow up or support were offered from lighthouse. I was basically told by [REDACTED], [REDACTED] at that time, that I must have imagined it happening and that, um. That I should stop drinking altogether. Um medical, uh, Bendigo Health and Austin Health. Uh, the year is January 2023. Um
 30 was taken to hospital with bilateral numbness, um, from the ribcage down, um, and inability to walk and very, very delayed speech. Unknown diagnosis at that time. Admitted to Bendigo Health um and was seen by four medical treatment teams in total. The first medical treatment team was actually I dismissed them because the senior doctor there decided to ask me how much was my aboriginality and why is my
 35 skin white if I'm Aboriginal? So, I requested the removal of that doctor from my treatment. Second doctor, very, very respectful. Um, but during the time I had a junior doctor have do a lumbar puncture on me and he left the lumbar puncture in my spine, um, and told me that I should get used to the pain.

40 **MATTHEW LEEDER:** My ancestors were used to it. Um, that was without witness, unfortunately. Um, he pulled the lumbar puncture out of my spine because he hit my spine and bruised it, um, and left me to be cleaned up by the nursing staff. Um, on Ward six at which they he broke one of the cardinal rules of nursing. Do not
 45 leave blood on the bed. Um, because I bled pretty badly. Um, during, uh, my time at the Bendigo Health, they couldn't get a diagnosis because they don't have a neuro ward. So, they transferred me to the Austin. Uh, first night there, I was given soft,

soft food. Even though I wasn't on a soft diet at that time. Um. Was told by one of the nursing staff, female in her mid-40s, she would have been. That it's okay to eat slop. It's what your family would have done on the mission. Um, I continue to just try to grab a wheelchair and go downstairs to the cafeteria and actually buy my own
5 food that night. Spoke to the Aboriginal liaison the next morning who gave me vouchers for the cafeteria if I wasn't happy with the food. So that was very nice and welcome. Um.

10 **TARA FRY:** Did you tell the liaison officer? Yes, or about all the comments?

MATTHEW LEEDER: And he just shook his head. He just shook his head. His exact word is bloody gubbers. And he was going to go see what he could do about it. Um, continue on with Austin Health. Um, was given. Um. Electrode. Um. Diagnostic where they put needles in your legs. Um, I requested fresh needles for
15 every single insert. The junior neurologists made the comment. It's okay. You've got people used to getting the same needle over and over again. And he also told me just to close my eyes and just picture myself in a field of sheep. He said your grandfather would have been used to being fenced into me. I reported that and that I actually got a formal apology off him.

20 **TARA FRY:** Because he acknowledged that he said it.

MATTHEW LEEDER: He acknowledged he said it.

25 **TARA FRY:** Yes.

MATTHEW LEEDER: So that was my time with Austin. So that was pretty traumatic. And during that time, a lot of the time I was not verbal, so I was handwriting unfortunately, or using my phone. Um, transfer back to Bendigo Health
30 rehab was good, but three weeks later was admitted back into Bendigo Health's program because I had continuous falls at home. Um. I ended up, I actually had issues with my spine from that failed lumbar puncture many months beforehand. Sent home with liquid ordines, which is better known as morphine in a liquid form. Because I had issues swallowing and talking. Upon the day of my discharge. After
35 this doctor came and spoke to me, I was removed by the hospital by security. The doctor told me that this young, this young junior doctor told me he made sure that everyone else was removed from the room. But he told me that if it gets too hard, it's okay. Just take some extra drinks of your morphine and you'll just go to sleep.

40 **TARA FRY:** I haven't heard of anyone getting it in the liquid form. Are they meant to give it?

MATTHEW LEEDER: Yeah, because I had to swallow it. Swallowing issues.

45 **TARA FRY:** Oh, okay. Yeah.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Um, so yeah, that was, that was really, really, um, a and I did I did have two attempts on my life during that time. Which I got that bad that I ended up going to Melbourne and going to Saint Vincent's and asking for help, which they were. They were useless. And I actually, uh, the Aboriginal liaison from
5 St Vincent's, um, because Saint Vincent's refused to put me into the Kuru beds in the psych ward. Um, they sent me up to Doctor [REDACTED] and Doctor [REDACTED] up at the Aboriginal Health Clinic right near Saint Vincent's. And for two days they worked with me to settle me down.

10 **TARA FRY:** And why wouldn't they put you in the Aboriginal beds?

MATTHEW LEEDER: Because I'm neuro as well.

TARA FRY: Okay.

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MATTHEW LEEDER: So, they can't have me with. At that time, I was on the walking frame and. Yeah, they can't have you in a psych ward with a, I can't even go in the psych ward with that. Yeah, yeah. So, um, the only, the only neuropsych beds in Australia are in Sydney. So yeah. So that's it. Thank you.

20

TARA FRY: Yeah. Um, so how do you think first, people's history and culture could be better taught at school.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Through truth telling? By bringing our elders into the
25 school to actually teach the true history of Australia. Not sugarcoating it with kids and utilising more, um, information booklets, books with the kids by reading them, like for example at kindergarten level. Um, utilising Archie, Archie and Ruby's book uh took the children away and then also utilising Adam Briggs's book, um, Our Home, Our Heartbeat by showing that we are emerging back. But we don't always
30 look the same as what we did pre-colonisation where we lived as communities. We lived nomadically we lived off the land. Unfortunately, now with conform, we now we now live by, by white man law. But we need to find a harmony within the world where we have law and law walk side by side, which is something that I know the Victorian Government themselves are committed to with, with the changes in the
35 treaty. But these, these changes also need to be taught to the kids directly from a young age so that we actually get them to take it home and teach mum and dad. Because unfortunately, with Australia being a multicultural society and a lot of these kids, English being a second language, it needs to be taught at the school level for the parents to learn as well. Okay.

40

TARA FRY: And um, how could Aboriginal kids be better supported at school.

MATTHEW LEEDER: By giving them more options? For example, I have an 18
45 year old daughter. Um, school wasn't for her, but we encouraged her to stay by her doing the course that she wanted to do as part of her year 11, year 12, and she walked away from not just, um, her VCE certificate, but also having her qualifications as a

5 funeral director. So, she, she walked away, walked away with a dual edged sword where her self-determination was already beginning. She already now has a career that will be able to be ongoingly used for the rest of her life, and then as she chooses to go on and progress within that field, because she's got that VCE subject with an inter school, she can then go on to university later on in life if she chooses to, which she's actually considering becoming an indigenous coroner.

TARA FRY: And, um, and you said the CSR really helped um, with the.

10 **MATTHEW LEEDER:** The Caso support is amazing. The fact that they're actually able to manipulate and change things to suit a young person's ability and strengths. Um, where with my daughter, her strengths were more of towards the sciences, and that's, that's the way her career has gone. Because every day she plays with chemicals and.

15

TARA FRY: And all of your caso's around here are elders are they.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Here in Bendigo? They are. But the ones we dealt with in Melbourne were not.

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TARA FRY: Okay. Just curious.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Aunty Kerry is amazing here.

25

TARA FRY: Yeah.

Speaker3: And any other ideas how we could improve the Victorian education system for the First Peoples in general.

30 **MATTHEW LEEDER:** In general. Um, more funding, especially towards the special needs element of indigenous young people, because unfortunately, there is a lot of Aboriginal children that have got, um, special needs, uh, and need additional support. And unfortunately, they fall by the wayside without that ability to go, to be able to progress in a direction that they actually want to go. Um, but there's
35 unfortunately still to this day, because of the frustration, they turn to crime. And with that crime, they developed gangs. And we're basically turning everything back to welfare dependency. We need we need an education system that takes our young people away from being welfare dependent.

40

TARA FRY: Um, what does it feel like to be an Aboriginal person living in Victoria?

MATTHEW LEEDER: In a lot of the cases, um, for myself, identity is a big thing that a lot of people go, oh, this is what this individual looks like. Um, self-image.
45 Um, because of having English and Irish and German blood and Chinese blood as well. Um. I predominantly always identify with my indigenous heritage very, very

first and foremost. But being in the professional world and being in the charity world as well, being a Rotarian, it gets questioned a lot, where even when we use the analogy of tea aboriginality is like tea, no matter how much milk you put in the tea, it's still tea. Um, I find the generation of stale male and pale um, don't seem to get
5 who we actually are because they were taught that the aboriginality can be bred out, unfortunately. And it's our it's our generation that's of the 50 plus still have that opinion that the aboriginality can be bred out of an individual, but unfortunately you can take you can take the fight out of the dog, but you can't take the dog out of the fight.

10

TARA FRY: Uh, what are the most important things you want people to know about your experiences?

MATTHEW LEEDER: Truth. Truth. Because at the end of the day, if we cannot
15 learn from the mistakes of the past and even the past that involved us in the current present, how can we move forward? How can we move forward as a people, and how can we move forward as a country? Understanding and acceptance of the traditional owners is unfortunately, something that was taken away from the education system even as early as when I was back at school. We weren't taught
20 about pre 1788. We weren't taught about the Stolen Generation. It was my family and grandfather that taught me about those things, and about how things came about, and how my great grandmother died on the streets of Fitzroy, and how the things she went through and her suffering was today can be actually understood and heard. Um, she died of [REDACTED] because she had 17 children, and all 17 of those children [REDACTED]
25 [REDACTED]. So, it makes it very difficult to even try to reconnect and find family in those in those circumstances. Um, and actually know who you are to be able to be able to be able to. I can go to my mum's, my mum's side and I know everyone until my mum's father and then from then backwards. It's all missing because of a wide adoption and the hiding of who? Her father, actually his father actually was. But
30 reconnecting and finding who I am on country without knowing who my family actually is. Country has become family as well. Thank you.

TARA FRY: What does self-determination look like to you?

MATTHEW LEEDER: Self-determination is to remove dependency, something
35 that us as a community basically did pre 1788. We had our self-determination. We had our meeting places, we had our trading points. We had food on the table for every meal. There was no poverty. There was no need. There was no theft. So what we need to do is break those chains that are being put in place through colonisation and create jobs for mob and create opportunities more for mob with mob. Bringing
40 us back together as one community rather than fractured, which unfortunately we are. We're all fractured at the moment.

TARA FRY: And what changes do you want to see for your children and
45 grandchildren?

MATTHEW LEEDER: More funding towards, um, positive education within the schools of truth telling. Um, more funding towards alternate pathways within school uh, including, um, traditional arts. Um, so there's some kids that are indigenous to the artistic but don't have the means or the ability to hone that, especially in their
5 younger years. And who's to say we don't we don't drag out some amazing artists that surface because at the end of the day, we are an ageing population in Australia. And who's going to continue on the, um, the basket weaving and all that sort of stuff. We're going to lose some of our more of our traditions as time goes on.

10 **TARA FRY:** Um, what does country mean to you?

MATTHEW LEEDER: Connection and home. It's a place that my ancestors walked. So, whether it's here on Djadjawurrung country or whether it's me home in Tasmania. But I found recently being on Biripi country and also, um, in the APY
15 lands, countries where you make it. So, you may be off country, but if you respect the land that you're walking on and you're treating it as your own, your country is everywhere. Your country is how you respect and treat your fellow traditional owners. And not just traditional owners, but the others that inhabit the area. I believe that if you show one person the dignity that you want yourself and respect, it should
20 be returned. Just as we just as we did for many, many generations, thousands of generations to be exact, when we when we walked on other people's countries and when we traded with them because we didn't just trade goods, we actually traded our family members, our daughters would marry sons and yada yada yada. But that also comes within the GLBTI community as well. The unfortunate introduction of
25 Christianity with within mob taught them that the practices that they did for thousands of years without judgement of homosexuality and transgender community. The judgement was never there. We respected our trans brothers and sisters. We. We always believed that they were born with three souls. So, two souls. And we. We understood that there was a third gender as traditional owners.

30 **TARA FRY:** Um, what has happened to your mob and to country because your land was taken.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Where do I start being Palawa? Um. I was grateful that my
35 great grandmother was brought to Victoria by her husband, who was an Inuit man who was a political prisoner sentenced in Tasmania. Um, but in Tasmania, the atrocities of the black line war and the wipe out of the blacks, uh, in Tasmania, unfortunately caused complete disband. Um, and to the point where my grandfather was led to believe that he was one of the last. But now to know that we're breeding
40 like rabbits. Um,

TARA FRY: Literally.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Literally. Um, it's making a huge change in bringing us
45 back. Because at the end of the day, regardless of what was said back in the day, that you could breed the black out, you can't because black is always in our heart.

TARA FRY: Um, what are some examples of good practices or programs happening on country that could be adopted more widely? So anywhere you've seen.

5 **MATTHEW LEEDER:** Indigenous men's sheds are really, really good to get men talking about issues at home to help them through the little nitty gritty. Um, because as an Aboriginal man, I experienced domestic violence in my [REDACTED] marriage. And unfortunately, the support programs there for men that aren't the offenders are not there. But through the men's shed, I was actually able to talk about
10 it with other men and continue back to our traditions of yarning and yarning circles, where us blokes could just talk about amongst fellow men and not feel judged because at the end of the day, as one of the uncles said to me, Matt, you're not alone, because there is other, there is others of us that have been through the same thing as what you've been through, and it's sometimes the fact that people got, oh, you're a
15 bloke you shouldn't be talking about. That is actually a big misconception.

TARA FRY: Anything. Any other good practices like programs?

20 **MATTHEW LEEDER:** I'm trying to think there's heaps.

TARA FRY: Yeah.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Heaps.

25 **TARA FRY:** Yeah no that's alright.

MATTHEW LEEDER: Um, indigenous Business Australia is really, really good. Um, with the with their business Start-Up program. Um, really, really good program because they support you through the process and actually will be there and hold
30 your hand to, to teach you and show you how to understand how to become a better, better and improving business.

TARA FRY: And what changes to laws or attitudes about sky, land, sky and waters would you like to see?
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MATTHEW LEEDER: I would like a certain amount returned to the traditional owners so that we so that we can develop. Our traditional farming methods, which actually do not destroy the land and actually work with the land. I would like to see a national adoption of our fire management, adopted on a national scale, rather than
40 rather than allowing the greenies to interfere with 85,000 years of, um, experience. Um. Trent Nelson here on Country is doing an amazing job at educating the CFA here in Bendigo on how that is done. My grandfather's done some work with that on the Yorta Yorta country. Um, and he still does work with the floods because he understands the rivers better than some of the other traditional owners. Um, but I
45 look at what's going on, um, and I think the traditional owner groups also need, need to be given back a certain amount of land so that they can begin programs to help

people return back to the land as well. Also housing programs with traditional owners in traditional owner areas because the unfortunately traditional owner homelessness is rife.

5 **TARA FRY:** Yeah.

MATTHEW LEEDER: And putting them in temporary accommodation and putting them in hotels is not the answer. Um, you're not, you're not you're not letting them create any self-determination or self-worth for themselves. You can give
10 someone a home, a house that's not a home. You give them a room. It's not. It's not theirs. Give them something that's actually theirs, rather than taking it continuously away. As Vincent Lingiari said back in the day, this land is mine and it's my grandfather's. It was my father's father's. So, returning those items to us, not
15 necessarily giving us everything back, but allowing us to take the land that we choose back is a better way to approach it so that we so we so we can at least create additional housing programs as well. Sorry.

20