

**Yoorrook Justice Commission**  
**Statement of Jaara Moran**

I'm Jaara Moran. I'm a proud Yorta Yorta, Djabwurrung, Biripi man from Tasmania as well. I grew up in the Wodonga region, but my family's from Kamukunji mission, which is over Barmah Way.

I come from the Moran side on Biripi and the Cooper side on Yorta Yorta, and my line can go back to Robert Cooper, which was William Cooper's oldest brother. And my other line, the Morans can go back to the first allocated direct ancestor of the Macleay Valley up in Kempsey.

My family is very complicated, I'll say. It's very broken because of the past trauma. I had my grandfather, who was a Christian preacher, get killed up in Wollongong when he was 32. And that's caused my family a big rift in my family because he was the glue. And they've all sort of expanded from Kempsey to Shepp to run away from the injustices up in Wollongong.

My father to lose that sense of identity with his culture because he was homeless from the age of 11 and to 18. And he's had heaps of injustices and broken promises from white support, we'll say back then, and that's caused a lot of family domestic violence to happen in my lifetime, when I was a young age, and it's caused me to have PTSD with a lot of the things which I'm currently healing through myself.

I work at Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation. I'm the prevention facilitator. I work with people who use violence in a family, domestic violence. And for my experiences, I believe that I can help the community and part through my healing journey.

I got told if you were young, who would you want to be when you're older? And then I thought about who I needed when I was younger and I thought, well, I can be that man. Or for who I wanted to be.

Probably the first resilience piece that I would have had to gone through, I wasn't even born yet. My mum, who I love to bits. She went to the hospital like she, she lost my older brother when he was six weeks old. And that led her down a path of self-medicating with drugs, and so did my dad. And then my sister was born, and then I was born, which I was very lucky to, because I recognised that if my brother didn't die, I wouldn't have even been born if that was the case.

When mum was having me, a doctor at the Albury Wodonga Health Centre, actually told her you and that baby are going to die, you have to abort the baby. And my mum decided not to, but she - against the wishes of the professionals. And later she had me, which very healthy, very healthy boy. About 12 pounds. Yeah, so big boy, but that was probably the first instance of my resilience and started before I was even born.

I also suffered from PTSD. I didn't fully develop and my frontal lobe wasn't fully developed. I didn't speak for six months. I was mute. And through about ten years of speech pathology I was able to just put together a sentence.

But when I was in kindergarten, I kind of realised, like, I was falling behind. I couldn't, at the age of six, I couldn't count backwards from 10 to 1 or 1 to 10, and I couldn't do my full alphabet. I really struggled. I couldn't read or write, like, even basic, basic like books, children's books.

I really express myself with actually art. Art was a very big thing for me, and it was a way that I could express myself. And one of the other ways that I kind of communicated with people was art and how I made friends was, I played footy, and it started about when I was five. I made some friends there and it was a good way to start.

I should say that my mum and dad, , gave me up to my mum's grandparents because my mum and dad couldn't look after me. I was forced to be raised by my grandparents, which I'm very grateful for giving me these good opportunities. But even they still have a bit of intergenerational trauma, but that's another topic. I went to a Albury Public, which was a predominantly white school. I was the only indigenous kid there. And I remember just sitting in a class in year one and the teacher's teaching about Captain Cook, like I'm 24 now, and that was like in 2006. Like they were teaching me about Captain Cook, and the only real representation of my culture that I had was a drawing of these cartoon fellas, and then this big Captain Cook fella standing over the top of them and getting told, oh, they just wandered around like nomads doing nothing like, all that.

And I didn't really have much self-confidence. I didn't really understand who I was, so I didn't have any identity. I just knew I was Aboriginal and the teachers in year one actually even asked me, oh, what's it like to be Aboriginal? What's all this? What's all that? I didn't understand, so I used to have to make up stories on what I thought, or what I envisioned being Aboriginal was like. So that was a really complex time. And the principal there, she wasn't the best.

So, from not being able to read or write, they used to have supports in there, and then it soon got cut. And then the principal made a comment to my nan saying "Black kids aren't meant to write". And lucky enough that she fought for it and got that principal fired. That gave me a great opportunity to actually read and learn. And I was still fell back, like I was still in all the, you know, not the dumb classes, but the classes that weren't the same as everybody else, mainstream.

I would, I would always get picked out too. I also got bullied by year six kids, and always because I was the only Aboriginal kid, they always used to pick on me and call me "little Abo". And I used to get hit all the time, and they said, "oh, what are you going to do, chuck your boomerang?" And then, I didn't really understand that, I was like, "oh, why are they picking on me"? And like, I haven't really done anything. But at the end of the day like, maybe, I don't know, I came back to rekindle one of the relationships. I was there having a yarn with this random bloke out one night and he's like, "oh, I went to Albury Public too". And like, he was actually the one that bullied me. He was like,

“oh yeah - like, I just found out that I'm Aboriginal too”. And I'm like, oh, like, okay. And he's like, yeah, and he actually came to me for questions that I had to find out on my journey. So that was very powerful to help out my community like that.

And then, so I went through kinder to year six there. Then I went to Xavier, the Xavier High School, and that was, I was the only black kid as well. So didn't have much culture around me. Didn't have much of anything like that and they will still always come to me. And I would have to make up these questions.

And I think it was when I was in year seven, actually, I was one of the first Aboriginal kids to do an Acknowledgement to Country at that school. I was very proud of that, but I didn't really understand the importance of that. And so glad that my sister was actually with me as well, so we both got to do it. And at high school, I actually still couldn't read or write. But I had it lucky enough. I had this one teacher which was really helping me out. Her name is Sally Ryan. I'm really blessed to have her help me in my journey. She helped me with my English from year seven to year 11. Like I couldn't read a book properly till I was 17.

When I was 14, I got kind of sick of getting asked all these questions about “oh, you're Aboriginal, like, what can you tell me about it?” So, I went on a journey by myself to kind of do some research about it, and push for getting a Koori worker at the school. And that's helped out these future generations at Xavier that wouldn't have got the same things that I got, so. Yeah, so I pushed that forward and they listened to me, I was very lucky to have actually, like, I know a lot of other kids like, do the same thing and they don't get listened to. So I was very lucky.

I had a good relationship, really good relationship with that teacher and she helped me out with all that. I didn't get told what happened behind the scenes, but what I'm assuming is that she put her voice forward to the principal and really pushed for it, because she could see this one kid really struggling to learn or have an identity in himself. So, I was very lucky with that.

So back to when I was growing up -I grew up with my grandparents and everything. It was borderline stable and the most stable that I would have ever gotten in my life. My pop, who raised me awesome. Showed me how to kick a footy. Showed me how to shave and everything, so yeah. So pretty much my father figure. And then my uncle as well, who is my mum's brother. He sort of raised me too. He was only 20 when I came in possession of my grandparents. And he helped raise me as well. I am very, very grateful. Very blessed. Very blessed. Because I know a lot of kids that don't get that same support, same opportunity.

I was actually a really good footballer. That was a way that I sort of had my self-worth. Saying, “oh, you're a good footballer”, I put football as my self-worth, as a gauging. And oh, like I'm wanted by people because I'm a good footballer, like, that's how I kind of saw it.

I graduated in 2018. And sadly, my pop did pass away from cancer in 2018. I was very distraught, and I didn't know what to sort of do there. And the AWASH system, they've

got mental health and that. But I didn't really trust them at all. I couldn't get that support. Like they said oh, they've got all these programs, but didn't get that support.

So, then I actually got into a bad crowd, and because a lot happened yeah, at the same time. I got diagnosed that I was chronically depressed. And I tried my hardest to sort of come back into building myself up into this adult. But I didn't know how to, like, I was a young man, didn't have anyone sort of showing me how to be a man. Like, tell me any guidance or any of that. So, I had that happened to me and I was actually working on it and I actually decided, because I really wanted to heal. I really wanted to be a role model to people.

So, I was doing student learning support work when I was 19, at one of the predominantly Aboriginal schools around here. And I loved that job, that was the best job in the world. I loved doing that, but sort of a thing that flicked to me like, I still didn't have that presence of that self-worth. So, I actually went into construction business, like plumbing and all that when I was 20. And that was very, very hard time for me, because there's very little cultural identity in that. I got verbally abused. Most of the time they'll ask me "what's the best petrol to sniff"? And I'll just come back and say, "oh, 98 is the one you want to go". So I always have that little chip on my shoulder, you could say.

Like even though they were trying to be, like, demeaning of me being an apprentice, and that was the only way that they knew how to. And the only way that I knew sort of how to was kind of just respond and go with it.

I'll go back a bit from in high school too, because it happened a lot in high school as well. Like the sirens will go by and all the all the boys were like, yeah, like nothing - like they wouldn't know any different, but they would have thought they'd be joking around. But it really hurt. Like they said, "oh, they're here for you". And I'll probably pretty much got that most of my high school career, and I as well went through a lot more racism, which wasn't perceived as racism, but it was perceived as just banter. But it was out, without my consent, really, which really kind of hurt. I definitely just pushed past that, like I could have left school. I did really want to leave school because of all that, but I just kind of pushed past it.

And bringing it back to plumbing and stuff, like, I got pushed into a very deep hole where I was self-medicating because I didn't trust the original system here, or even the health system, because what has happened to my mum. Like, didn't trust that at all. So, from there I actually got in a lot of trouble. So down a bad path.

But at high school I got sick of the racism and I brought it up to the teacher who helped me, because I felt like that was the only teacher I could talk to because my voice was heard. I was very lucky because I know a lot of people around me growing up. As I said, like a lot of them were Aboriginal, that they actually committed suicide because of it. They had not culture and because they were a lot lighter than me. So they weren't getting that. They were missing out on a lot of cultural stuff, that identity. So, what I was struggling with when I was younger.

I won't say I'm fully resilient, but when I was that age, like, I actually tried to hang myself when I was six, because I didn't really want to be here. I wanted to be in a better place. I was very lucky. Yeah, that was a bit heavy. But yeah, that's the story of how important culture needs to be in the school system.

So instead of just dwelling on those negatives and making them a big thing in my life, I switched it around. I wanted to push them to be positive and help out my community, because I love my community, I've grown up here my whole life. And just be there for my community, be the role model that I never got, so - and I'm very grateful that I had that. That I had that mindset, yeah. And I have got a little girl, and I got a little son on the way too.

I work at Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation on the border, so pretty much the Wodonga side, Victorian side. I'm a prevention facilitator, so I work with men who use violence, or people that use violence in a family violence perspective. And I also run the men's group here. And I also just created a men's behavioural change program by my own experiences, and what support has helped me. And I've created that all into a program that will help other people that haven't had the same opportunities that I have had.

I didn't even realise, like the big impact, and then I have other people telling me, this is amazing, like this is phenomenal. Like, how can you do that? I'm like, I've literally just put everything that I needed when I was that age into this one program for other people. And the best thing has been learning to write a report. Like, I couldn't read or write when I was 17. I just learned how to read and write, and now I can write a whole essay and report on somebody else's issues that can't actually write or read. And I'm the voice for them in this system, which I feel very, very proud to be, and very privileged to have that opportunity given to me.

So what most people don't understand that Albury Wodonga is its very dark history here that has been swept under the carpet, and I've been lucky enough to be shown around one of the uncles here who's actually told me about all the stories and everything. I really want to advocate so people actually know, it's this awesome touristy town in between, on the border of New South Wales. But like, what does the actual culture side is, and the actual culture side is that mobs from everywhere, so from Queensland to New South Wales, used to come together for the bogong moth, and they used to meet in Huon Hill at the top there, because that was the highest point. And if you actually look at Albury Wodonga, it's a big, pretty much a big bowl. It looks like a big bowl from above.

But the significance for Albury Wodonga is it used to be a stopping point for all the mob, and everything around here you can eat, pretty much eat. It's a food source, it's a food bowl. And a lot of it has been taken down because of, I'll say yeah, the rising, or the demand in living. So, the more houses, like, taken away from that land, take away from the resources, getting polluted.

I really just want to also point out, like, we've got heaps of massacre sites around here because they knew that there were mob from everywhere. So, it was the easiest spot

to sort of take them out. And I just want that to be recognised to people, because as sad as it is, it is part of the history of Australia. And it's something that shouldn't be swept away, because at the end of the day, like history always repeats itself. And you've got this older generation, which we're very blessed to have them, too, because they've fought for everything white or not - or Aboriginal. Like, but they're slowly going away. So, their ideologies will be their bad ideologies would be taken away with them. And hopefully this new ideology of this compassion, empathy for everyone would be in this new generation.

And the opportunity for sport for Indigenous kids around here is very minimal. Like, it's seen as the - yeah, it's the border of everything. I grew up in Albury, that's New South Wales, I had to fly to Sydney for it. For most of the footy carnivals, for most of everything. I was very lucky I had that support. But like, you get these other mobs who don't have that support. Like, they can't afford it. Like, that was about \$500, just to fly over to play footy and everything. So, it was very, very hard. I understand it's very hard for families like that. And then they're stuck here when there's some amazing footballers around here. I grew up with some amazing footballers. It was my to make friends, the only way I made friends. It was my networking, like yeah. And then me learning, relearning everything to now, like, I kind of realise like - yeah, I played for Albury my whole life.

I'm going back to Albury this year. But yeah, and then I played for all the state side. So I made the new South Wales representative team. And when I was 15, that was about ten years ago, now I'm that old. Yeah, I was like thinking about that. And then having that helped me out, which I was very lucky. And I actually had a great opportunity that Richmond Football Club sort of took me in. So, through the Indigenous leadership roles, like I got to play a game in the VFL there for them. Only one game, but I still put that on my shoulder, like yeah mad. Hopefully I might make it when I'm 27 in the VFL. I'll be happy with that. But had that, put me on a pedestal, and got into the TAC Cup team, but sadly got cut. But I still try to push for it, push for it.

And then yeah, like as I said back in 2019, like I just had that all taken away from me. So, a very complicated, but a very journey that I'm grateful for. And a few of my mates are playing AFL now, so it's great to see them sort of using that as a - using that for the, in their journey. I'm part of the Milawa Suns, so that's the football - that's the football team from up here that goes to the statewide carnival. And we're lucky enough that we're able to go down because a few years I wasn't able to, and I really wanted to, but now we've got an opportunity where we've got these younger fellas, or these young men who are able to play there. And then how I see myself is I need to be that role model for them, how they should conduct themselves. And maybe it might give them an a good opportunity to get out of there.

And I just connected up with my little cousin. He's, so his, yeah, his dad and my dad are brothers, and sadly, he doesn't have either - either of his parents here today. They both passed away, sadly. And I actually just rekindled with him, and he's 17. I've been very lucky to put into this opportunity of being a role model for the next generation. And especially for my family. Like, I get told stories that my cousins are talking about me to

their younger siblings like, oh, you got this mad fellow down in Albury Wodonga, that's Uncle Waldo's son. And he's mad footballer, like, doing great for his community. And just hearing those stories, like, it's just what motivates me to be the person I want to be in the future, which is a very, very powerful man and a very, an advocate for my community.

There's actually a good quote from Sir Doug Nicholls: "life's like a piano, like you gotta - to hear the tune, you have to play the black Keys, and then the white keys as well. But to get harmony, you have to play both". So it's about understanding the white side and then understanding the black side too. So, and having that harmony in there.

I'm doing my role. I'm doing my - doing my ancient role, what I would have been put forward for. I am a sponge to knowledge. I suck in any knowledge I have. I want to learn the lore of Albury Wodonga because it was never there. I want to be the person that knows everything around here, and be that educating role model. Be the real, just be the man of - be the top elder of this area and maybe even - yeah, I'll be aiming for being the - what is it? Being the next knighted person around here. So yeah, that's what I'm aiming up to be. Big goals.

I love my culture. It's brought me back to a place of healing and a place of understanding and making myself proud of me, and proud of my family, which I've never been showed, I've always got shown the bad side. Because it's amazing, like just getting culture back. And I've done all the traditional diets, and I've done all this other stuff. I do smoking ceremonies, I do acknowledgement of countries, and I get a great understanding. And I just love talking about my people, I'm very proud of my people.

**END OF STATEMENT**