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Joan Kirner Social Justice Oration 2019

Presentation by

Professor Helen Milroy

Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist
and Winthrop Professor at the
University of Western Australia

Communities in Control Conference

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About the presentation:

How can we improve as a society if we avoid taboo topics of discussion? How can we improve as a society if our default is denial and disbelief? The wicked issues of our time will never go away until we as a society face them head on and pledge to address them. It's time to make some noise.

Professor Helen Milroy is a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist and Winthrop Professor at the University of Western Australia.

A descendant of the Palyku people of Western Australia's Pilbara region, she was a Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. She studied medicine at the University of Western Australia and worked as a general practitioner and Consultant in Childhood Sexual Abuse at Princess Margaret Hospital for children for several years before completing specialist training in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Introduction by Denis Moriarty
Now it's time for the final keynote, the Joan Kirner Social Justice Oration. It's something very dear to my heart. Before our final speaker begins, I would like to take a moment to talk about Joan Kirner. Joan, as I'm sure everyone here knows, was Victoria's first female Premier and probably our most courageous social justice warrior. I was lucky enough to call her a friend and to work for her.

Joan was a fearless campaigner for women. She also went into bat for education and the environment. In fact, she fought inequality wherever she saw it. Those of you who were lucky enough to meet her would understand that this focus on fairness and equality really came from Joan's deep empathy with people - all people, everyday people – and I'm sure Ron, Joan's partner in life, would attest to that. He was very much a part of that journey. We are honoured to have Ron here today. Please welcome Ron.

The theme for communities in control this year came from Joan. It was she who ordered us – she was very good at that – to get angry and then get organised (her exact words). Eight years ago, we decided to name the social justice oration in Joan's honour. Now in its eighth year, the oration has been delivered by Joan herself in 2012, and by Hugh de Kretser, Sharan Burrow, Julia Gillard, Lieutenant General Dan Mori, Waleed Aly, and Andrew Denton, and, last year, by Gillian Triggs. This year we are very honoured to add to that eminent list Professor Helen Milroy.

Helen is a consultant and child and adolescent psychiatrist , she is Winthrop Professor at the University of Western Australia, she is a descendant of the Palyku people of Western Australia's Pilbara region, and she was a Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. She studied medicine at University of Western Australia and worked as a general practitioner as a consultant in childhood sexual abuse at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children for several years before completing specialist training in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Helen is one of our finest and most eminent Australians. Please make her welcome.

Professor Helen Milroy
Thank you very much for inviting me to come and speak today.

Before I start, I'd like to pay my respects to the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and to remind you that, underneath us today there are thousands and thousands of years of Indigenous history.

I never had the pleasure of meeting Joan, but I've read her social justice oration on the conference website and I really admire what she stood for. My respects to her partner, who's here today. She was courageous, ceaseless, clever and compassionate, and they're really wonderful qualities to have in our leaders, aren't they?

In fact, I suggested at a forum recently that perhaps the KPIs for CEOs and leaders and managers and politicians could be not only the usual things, but, in addition, kindness. Wouldn't it be great if we had kindness as a KPI? That might make a difference going forward.

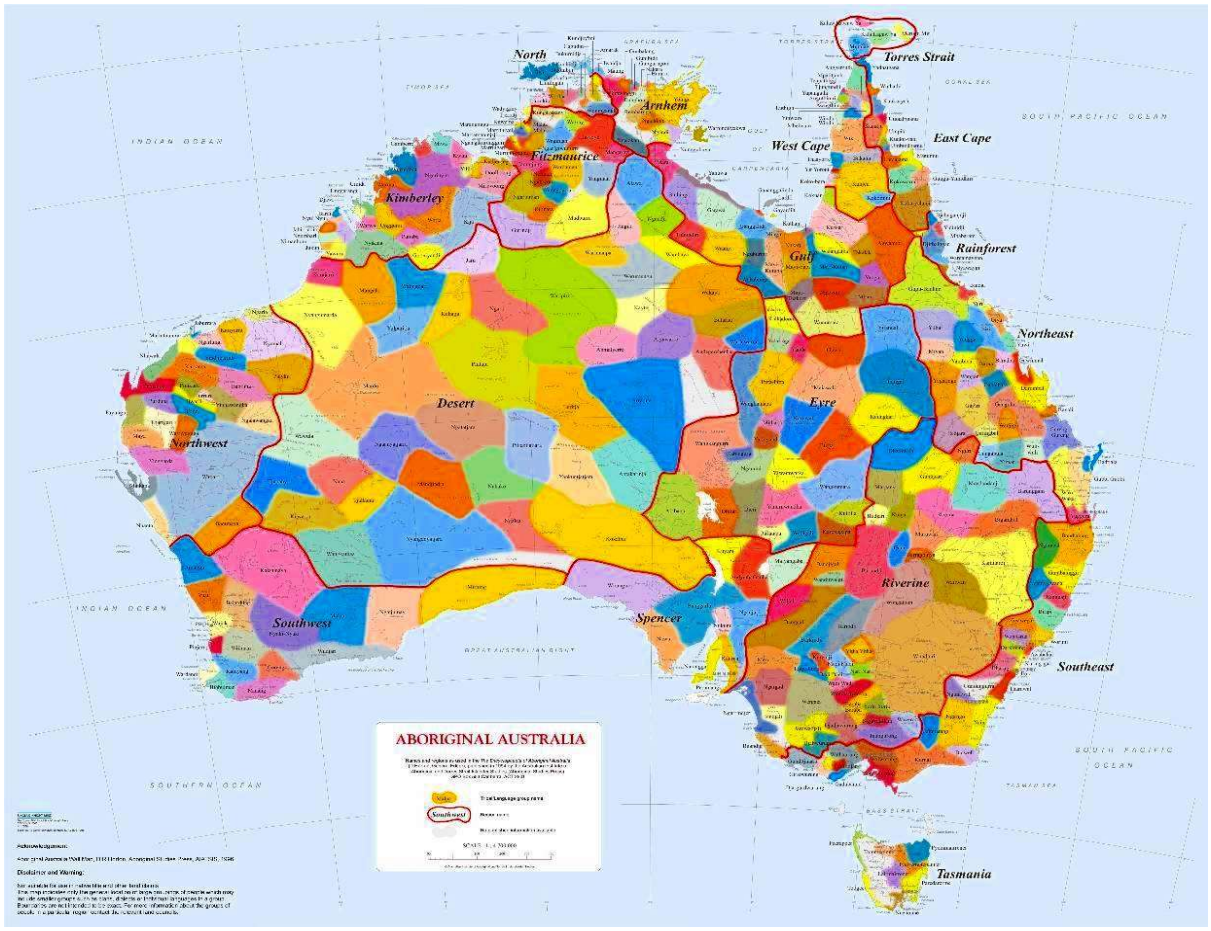
So where are we in society today?

It's easy to see the problems in our own time and forget about all the progress and all the successes we've had. I'm certainly glad I'm a woman living in today's society compared to my grandmother's time or my great-grandmother's time – but there are still so many problems that we have to conquer.

Does anyone really think we have equity yet? Really? No, I didn't think so. Listening to David Manne's apology to the refugees made me think that it's really not surprising, is it, that we live in such a hypocritical society. If you only look at what happened in this country with Indigenous peoples, Australia was founded on trauma and denial and a lot of cruelty to children and to other people. It's not surprising that we're repeating history. It's just unfortunate that we don't learn from it, and we often don't.

The other thing that's happening in the modern world is that due to advances in technology and communication we are now the most connected society ever, and the most disconnected. If you think about that, and the impact of that on children, that creates a different sense of what we have to do for the future. As we know, social justice is essentially about fairness in society. It's also about how we relate to each other, and, of course, we all exist in relationships with family, community, and society, as well as the environment and the world at large. For me, relationships are essentially about stories: stories about creation, about life, about family, so I'm going to use stories and paintings for this presentation.

I wasn't quite sure what to speak about today, so I thought I'd speak about the things I've been most passionate about in my life, and that is children, Indigenous issues, and mental health, and, of course, all of these things can be linked together.



So just by way of introduction, that X marks the spot. That's my mob up in the Pilbara there. Beautiful country. Very hot. Don't go in summer. But you can see that that Aboriginal map of Australia is very different to the normal lines and maps that we see represented.

It's so important to know where we come from.

This is my grandmother holding my mother.

This is me holding my first child. I'm quite a bit younger then. And I guess we just have to always remind ourselves that, whenever we talk about social justice, we have to talk about relationships and the fact that generations are so important. As my grandmother held my mum and my mum held me and I hold my children, that's how life should be.

But is that what happens today? Is that what's happening in families today? Let's have a little bit of a think about where we are currently. We don't actually have a very good track record in Australia at dealing well with children and families, and that was really brought home to me during the five years of the Royal Commission.

Just to set the scene, I'm going to tell you a story about Dingo and Moon. Dingo and Moon had been friends for as long as anyone could remember. They started off together full of joy and hope as a little pup and a new moon many years ago. Each phase of life brought different challenges. In the first phase, life was wonderful and exciting and each night they would share their stories and laugh together. But in the second phase, Dingo had been hunted almost to the point of extinction. At times, he even had his ears cut off for a bounty of

five shillings. For many years, Dingo could no longer sleep in his country. The stench of blood on the landscape kept him away. He cried out to Moon and Moon watched in despair. Moon tried to comfort Dingo and stay true to her word. Moon would always be there waiting for Dingo, listen to his stories, and send moonbeams to stay with him.

In the third phase, things started to change. Dingo started to grow strong again, but was still scared about what might happen. He slept with one eye open, just in case. The world started to realise they needed Dingo. He had a lot of knowledge and knew how to look after country. The moon looked on with renewed hope. In the fourth phase, Dingo and Moon rejoiced once again. Although Dingo was very old and tired, he was at peace. He knew his children would be safe and grow even older than he was. He knew his grandchildren would remember the stories and feel proud and strong and the whole world

would see just how remarkable they are. He knew his great-grandchildren would finally be able to walk this land and be leaders among men.

Dingo had found his voice again and sang a beautiful love song to Moon, thanking Moon for always being at his side. Moon had grown full and bright and lit up the landscape with a golden glow surrounding Dingo. Dingo smiled and said to Moon, "Finally, I will sleep like a pup again tonight." He closed his eyes for the last time and fell into a deep sleep, dreaming of happy times. Moon smiled and watched over him, just as she had done since the beginning of time.

There are many ways we can think about that story. We're not in phase four yet. A lot of our mob are still sleeping with one eye open because they really don't know what's going to happen. I think about my grandmother and my mother and what they went through in this country, and I think about my mother's grandchildren and great-grandchildren and I ask if they're going to have an opportunity to be leaders amongst men.

I was at an international women's forum a little while ago. We were talking about the inequities women experience, and I posted a question to the men in the room: "What are you so scared about if women were to get into positions of power and control? That the world's going to be a better place?" I wondered the same for our mob. What are people so frightened about if our mob gets up there, and we become healthy and thriving, and our children become leaders of men? There's nothing to fear. We have a whole industry surrounding our disadvantage. It's about time we stopped that and started to use our strengths to actually thrive.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the experience of the Royal Commission, only because it shows the way we dealt with children in years gone by. As we know, the Royal Commission had in its terms of reference to better protect children, to achieve best practice in reporting and responding to child sexual abuse, and to address and alleviate the impact of what happened. Did any of you see any of the public hearings livestreamed? Were you aware of of the stories and the institutions that we looked at? It was pretty extensive. We were well covered in the media for a very long period of time. People have often asked me since, "What was the experience of being on the Royal Commission like?" and I have

to say it was both profoundly disturbing and incredibly inspiring, all at the same time, and very intense, over the entire five years.

I have to pay my respects, too, to all of the people who came forward and helped us with the enquiry, often at great personal cost. It took a lot of courage, and I was very inspired by some of their stories of survival. When I sat and listened to their stories I often thought that if that had happened to me I don't know if I'd be here today.

Lots of people contacted us during the five-year enquiry. We did just over 8,000 individual private sessions, as well as the ones that were in the public hearing. We referred a lot of matters to the police. We held sessions all over the country. We went to all the prisons. For a lot of the people in prison – men in particular, but many women as well – if someone had have just looked after them as children, they probably wouldn't be in jail now, and I think that's just as true today as it was back then. We heard complaints, too, about nearly three and a half thousand institutions. Anywhere where children are, basically, there's the potential for exploitation and abuse.

We heard from a lot of men in the private sessions, which was unusual because a lot of times in these sorts of enquiries we do hear more from women; and that's good, that's great, but it's also important to hear the voices of men as well, to hear about the differences in the impact that these things had on them as children and growing up to be men in society.

We had an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as you can imagine, because of the stolen generations and the widespread removal of children into institutions. We heard a lot about the missions. I'd really thought that I'd understood the magnitude of what happened in this country. I'd lived through it with my own family. My mother was a stolen gen. Those things had happened to my grandmother and all of our ancestry. But it wasn't until the Royal Commission, where I sat through so many stories of generational removal, of generational trauma, that I really felt it. Some of the missions that had been around for over a hundred years. How many generations of children is that, all going through that same level of profound trauma?

And then what do we do? We shove them back into the community and expect them to all be okay with very few resources and very little help. We've systematically dismantled families and communities over generations. That's why we're in the state we're in today.

And the other thing I think that was really interesting about trauma and particularly trauma in childhood is it often goes unnoticed and undisclosed and, in fact, for a lot of people that came to us, it was a good 20 years before they disclosed. We had some people come who were in their 90s that were disclosing to us for the first time. That's an incredibly long time for people to have to hold on to those stories, and for a lot of people it was the first time they'd ever spoken about their story.

So we didn't do very well with children back then, and these stories aren't all from the '40s and '50s and '60s. These are also contemporary stories. We saw a reasonable number of young people who were already in - who were currently in or just out of out-of-home care.

If we have a quick snapshot and we look at some of the data from the AIHW report - I'm not going to spend a lot of time on data - are we doing better or are we doing worse? Well, according to the AIHW, we're increasing our numbers in out-of-home care. We are a really wealthy country. We know how to do things really, really well. Why is this happening? Don't we know how to bring up children well? Don't we know how to support families? I think we do. So there's something wrong if we're increasing the numbers of kids in out-of-home care, and I feel really sorry for people working in the out-of-home-care sector because they get a really bad rap, and in fact, they have one of the most important jobs in the country. They're looking after and bringing up our future citizens. In fact, I suggested that we should overfund them so that they have everything they need to make sure that every child they have to deal with has the best possible chance to recover and achieve in life.

So removals are going up. The removals for Aboriginal kids are going up at a much greater rate. We're now up to 10 times the non-Indigenous rate. A few years ago, it was about six, so it's rapidly increasing. In fact, in some states,

almost one in two Aboriginal families has contact with the child protection system.

If we look at juvenile justice, Aboriginal kids are 25 times as likely to be in detention, and sometimes it's for really minor things, and a lot of it is about trauma and disadvantage, not about criminality. When we were looking at some of the juvenile justice systems as part of the Royal Commission, we looked at some of the models in Scandinavia. They don't lock up juveniles. They don't have a detention system like we do. They see where juveniles are having these sorts of behaviours or problems as an issue in development for the child, and they have a wrap-around rehabilitative focus, not so much a punitive one.

If we look at suicide rates, they're increasing as well, and, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, depending on which community you look at, they're very high. In fact, some of the highest rates almost in the world. And the age of self-harm is getting younger. We're already aware of the family violence figures as well as the hospitalisations for Aboriginal women. So children are still growing up in these toxic childhoods. We can do better than that.

So why are children important? Well, I think that one of the beautiful things about a child is that it brings new life and it's so precious when you first hold your child in your arms when you've just given birth. It's just a wonderful, wonderful feeling. If we can't be joyous and we can't celebrate new life, then do we value life at all? And what happens at the end of life? Are we going to give anybody any dignity at the end of their life if we can't actually ensure the healthy arrival of all of our children? And we still have issues in antenatal care, we still have issues with low birth weight. We have lots of problems still in some of our communities in just getting basic health care. And what about family?

It's really interesting that we have a child protection system - which is really important; I'm not against children being removed if they need to because of safety - but what a lot of people told us - and we saw a lot of people in the Royal Commission who were in the out-of-home care system - what a lot of people told us was that, at the end of that journey through out-of-home care,

they ultimately went back to find family, because family is actually enduring and it is something that we all want a connection to.

So do we do enough to support families to be loving like this, to be able to nurture their children well? If we've systematically dismantled Aboriginal families over generations, what have we done to systematically put that back together or help them to reclaim those cultural practices that were so good for children, and I'm going to talk a little bit more about that in a minute. But family is absolutely essential if we're going to bring about the wellbeing of our children.

So if we look at Aboriginal kids in general, do Aboriginal kids get an Aboriginal childhood? What do you think? Some do but a lot don't, and, if you certainly look at a lot of our kids that are in out-of-home care and the juvenile justice system, they miss out. I remember having a little boy in clinic once and I had an Aboriginal flag sticker on my table, and he said, "That's my country." I said, "Yeah, that's right." I said, "Do you know where your country is? Do you know which mob you belong to?" and he said no. He had no idea about his heritage or his identity or anything cultural, but he knew that that sticker somehow represented him.

We don't have many representations of Aboriginal children in society. In fact, one of our earlier speakers put up the lack of representation of multicultural Australia within society. Well, it's still the same for our mob as well.

Do Aboriginal children have a right to history? Do they get to hear about what happened so that they can have a context for understanding, perhaps, some of the reasons why their family or community is in the state it's in. I don't think we always teach it very well. Do they have a right to recovery and healing? We have some amazing healing practices in Indigenous society that don't get recognised. It's all put down to sort of myth or mythology or legend or whatever, but we actually have some very, very good, well thought out and very expert ways of providing a healing for children and for adults and for old people that goes completely unrecognised.

Do children have a right to self-determination? Self-determination seems like it's only a bad word when you put it to the Aboriginal context. Everyone else can have it except us somehow. And it's hard to have an individual capacity for self-determination if you don't see it in your community or in your parents or in the adults around you. When you're kept in a situation of dependency or powerlessness, it's hard for children to exercise that right to self-determination. And do Aboriginal children have a right to their own story? To the right story? To start off the right way in life and to be able to live out the story as it should be?

Some of the Aboriginal people I saw from missions and stolen gen said they were given the wrong story. That wasn't meant to be their story, and they now have to rewrite that for themselves. So what's an Aboriginal birthright? If you're born into a culture and a group, then it gives you a sense of who you are, who you belong to, your country that you're born from, your belief systems and your values, and it gives you meaning. For a lot of the Aboriginal kids I saw in services, they were very displaced. They were caught between two worlds. They weren't black, they weren't white, they didn't know who they were, and they didn't know how to be in the world. They also couldn't explain some of their cultural experiences because they had no frame of reference, so they were just lost. They were just completely lost.

If we look at kinship and attachment, for example, we have the safest kinship system in the world. [Bolbi (sp?)] would have been very proud of us. You couldn't be an orphan in Aboriginal society. There was no such concept. Kinship and attachment was very broad. You had lots of mothers, you had lots of fathers, you had lots of grandmothers and lots of grandfathers, and it was reciprocal, so as you became an old person you became someone's daughter or someone's son, and they had that responsibility then to make sure that you were okay. So it was a very broad attachment system and it also attached you to nature, to a totem, to your country, to special places.

We also have spiritual and cultural determinants in development, not just social determinants. There's so much emphasis on dealing with poverty and disadvantage and employment and then we forget about identity and meaning and development of emotion that's based on those spiritual and cultural

determinants. It's important to know who you are and where you've come from. It's important to have a culture and an identity that's linked to where you're born from. You've got to have pride and purpose and place, and it's really lovely to have this sense of continuity of existence.

I know one of the times when I went back to country as a young woman, standing on the land of my ancestors was a profoundly moving experience. To think that all my ancestors had been here made me feel good. It gave me a great sense of wellbeing and a great sense of pride as well.

So if we look at the right to history, it's important that we allow children, particularly Aboriginal children but also non-Aboriginal children, to know about our culture, that we are the oldest enduring culture in the world. It's not just about historical trauma, but that's important as well.

If we think about our education system, do we teach Indigenous history well? What does everyone think? When my mum - my mum's 91. She lives with me. She probably should have died years ago but she's just so angry, she's not going to die, but she often used to do cultural education in schools and they always said to her, "No, we don't want any of that history stuff. We don't want you talking about any negative - we don't want you talking about stolen generation. We just want the warm fuzzy stuff." That's not education. I mean, that's good too, because it's really nice to have some of that cultural stuff, but we've got to teach real history.

I've taught for a long time at university in medicine, and it's really variable what students come to university with. Sometimes they come with a really good knowledge and understanding of what happened and some come with virtually nothing and some come with very stereotypical and prejudiced views. Isn't it about time you got this right? Come on, guys, you know. Let's have an education revolution and just say - I'm not looking at blame or guilt or shame. It's just history. Let's just teach it properly so we can get past it and get on with it, because I think it's really important and it's important for our kids to know that that's why their families are in the state they're in.

And also I think for the rest of Australia to know what happened in this country as well, because the past is in the present. History doesn't go away. We have this transgenerational trauma burden now. We have very few role - well, I shouldn't say role models. Apparently that's an overused term. But if you think about representations for Aboriginal kids in society today, what are they? Football? Look, I was a slow runner. That's not a good role model for me. You know, but we need to have more. We need to have those representations so our kids can aspire to do anything, to be anything.

I ran a centre at the University of WA for a long time to get medical students - Aboriginal medical students through university and out into the community as doctors. It's been incredibly successful. It's a really big success story right - in fact, a lot of the medical schools have done that now and we have a lot of Aboriginal doctors around. We don't really get to hear about that very often, do we? We don't get to really hear about many of those success stories. We either hear the negatives or we hear about football. It's about time we sort of did a little bit better than that.

We have a lot of unfinished business. Do you remember when there was the build-up to the apology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? Do you remember that? I can remember having an Aboriginal kid in clinic who'd been beaten up in the playground because these kids had said to this little kid, "You're going to steal my backyard if we say sorry." That's the level it had got to. There was so much misunderstanding and propaganda that went around. What happened after Rudd did the apology? Was there any great catastrophe? No. In fact, it was really well received and I thought it was actually well done. My mother spent three days crying before the apology but she was very pleased with how it was done.

So I think we have to get past some of this stuff and just deal with it in a pragmatic sense so that it doesn't become a barrier or a burden to going forward. We're now in a really critical point because we're going to have this whole issue and debate probably now with the new government coming back in around sovereignty. Are we going to have treaty? Are we going to have Constitution recognition? Where are you going to sit on that? These are going to be critical issues going forward. I don't want to see that same gutter debate we had last

time like we had over the apology. It was really harmful. Really harmful. So if we're going to have a debate this time going forward, let's make sure it's a positive one and it's based on a true sense of what's required as opposed to myth and misunderstanding.

And we still have a lot of problems with access to services. We still have a lot of racism. In fact, I think a lot of people don't even realise how racist some of our institutions of care are because that's what they were founded on, and some of them haven't changed their practice a whole lot, and we really need to have a good look at the way services are delivered in regard to that. We still have racism in regard to health and justice and a lot of other services as well.

And there's still, I think, a lot of myth or misunderstanding around who's Aboriginal in this country now and who's not. One of my medical students that I had some years ago got so sick of other medical students saying to her, "Which part of you is Aboriginal?" so she said, "My left foot. See, it's quite brown compared to the other one." Let's just get past all this stuff.

So we've had many successes. We really have. We've had the rise of Indigenous professionals, and I just heard from someone in the audience - in fact, he's just sitting there - that you're on the board of a PHN, is that right? Yay. Because when we were listening to that talk about meritocracy - I don't know how many times people have said to me, "Helen, you have to understand, these board positions are based on merit." I'm a doctor, I'm a psychiatrist, I'm a professor, I've been a Royal Commissioner, and you're telling me there's not enough Aboriginal people in this country that could do a board position based on merit? I also said to them, "What about your merit for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? Do you have any?"

We're doing a lot better in education than we were years ago, but still not good enough, so we're still getting students at the university who wouldn't have got into the tertiary courses based on their year 12 exit marks but, with bridging, they do really, really well. So we're still failing, to some degree, in education. Do we just not know how to do it, do we not bother or do we still have low expectations that we're not going to achieve very well?

And let's have a look at things like reports, recommendations. How many reports have sat on the shelves? How many recommendations have actually gone ahead? I don't know about you guys but I've been involved in a lot of policy writing over recent years. I feel like I just keep writing the same policy because it doesn't really get implemented.

Now, I'm going to have to speed up because I want to tell you the story at the end.

So we should have the right to recovery as well. We are not recovering from transgenerational trauma. We are recovering from generations of trauma imposed on us. It hasn't been transmitted by us deliberately, it's occurred to us, and so we are healing from genocide, and we have to have restorations within and over generations. If we look at a rights-based approach, we know that health and human rights are linked. If we look at Indigenous rights, we know that we should have the right to transmit our culture to our children and that our children should be able to enjoy their culture and language.

How many schools teach Aboriginal languages in this country? Probably not many. Some do. Some are fantastic and certainly some of the remote ones, they really take part in language. If we lose Indigenous languages, which we are losing at a rate of knots, they don't exist anywhere else in the world. So they're lost once they've gone.

So there was this thing that came out a few years ago back in 2002 which was called A World Fit For Us, which was the children's statement, and it followed up with A World Fit For Children, and I just wanted to draw your attention to a couple of lines. This was from the children themselves. "We are not expenses, we are investments. And you call us the future but we are also the present." I think that's really quite profound from a group of children, isn't it? Because we do talk about children being our future but then we just ignore them till they're in trouble and then we try and do something about it.

So A World Fit For Children also talks about putting children first. Wouldn't it be great if we thought about any policy or any program, what the impact on the child would be or the impact on the family would be, rather than the impact on

economic benefit? So I think Aboriginal children need an Aboriginal childhood. It's absolutely essential, particularly if we're going to safeguard this land and this country for future generations, because they are going to be the future custodians. They are going to be the people that do your Welcome to Country so that you have safe passage when you travel around. They are going to be the ones that know the creation stories and the special parts of country. It's really important that we ensure their right to an Aboriginal childhood, and an Australia fit for Aboriginal children has to include all of these sorts of things.

Because I'm going to run out of time, I'm going to move on to a story that I want to tell you. Part of working at the Royal Commission, given that it was a very traumatic experience, I started writing children's stories. So I wrote a series of stories called Bush Mob, and I'm going to read you one of those stories because I think it just fits in with the final message that I want to leave. It's called Cockatoo Wars, and you'll have to indulge me because I did all these illustrations on the plane.

The black and white cockatoo clans had been fighting for such a long time, no one could remember when or how it all started. The fight was the same, though. Who was responsible for looking after the ancient forest? The cockatoo nesting trees were situated across the south side of the forest and they had been nesting in these trees since the beginning of time. All the bush mob and the cockatoos knew how important the ancient forest was. It was the beginning of creation and held within it great knowledge, stories and healing. The knowledge was handed down through the generations and it was everybody's responsibility to care for the forest.

Everyone had stopped going to the ancient forest as they couldn't get past the fighting cockatoos. You can imagine how loud it was too. Instead of looking after the forest, the cockatoos spent their time fighting over it. Over time, the fighting had gotten worse. Now the black boss cocky and the white boss cocky were fighting day and night. There was no peace anywhere.

The young chicks in their nest were very stressed and not growing well. Some had lost all of their feathers. One day, the two boss cockies were fighting so much the trees were shaking and the two baby cockatoos fell from their nests -

one black cockatoo baby and one white cockatoo baby. They landed side by side on the ground. The two mothers immediately flew down to rescue their babies. Because both the babies had lost their feathers, they looked the same. The two mothers could not tell them apart.

The two mothers decided there was only one solution. They would rear the children together until it was clear who was who. They snuck away to the other side of the forest where no one would find them. Being on the other side of the forest was peaceful and the mothers and babies thrived. It wasn't long before the babies' feathers started to grow but the mothers didn't want to go back to all that fighting. Instead, they decided to raise the babies as brothers in the forest together. They spent many happy times together in the forest, teaching and learning all of the stories about how to care and understand the forest and all its gifts.

One day, they were visited by the eagle who lived at the edge of the desert to warn them of a large fire that was rapidly approaching. There was no firebreak anymore because the ancient forest had been neglected. In their conflict, the boss cockies had forgotten what was important and how to protect the forest.

The four cockatoos knew what was at stake and flew back to get help. The two boss cockies were still fighting and wouldn't listen. In desperation, the four cockatoos went to bush mob council to warn them about the fire. Everybody responded immediately. They had to stop the fire before it reached the ancient forest or all could be lost. They quickly came up with a plan. Some of the older bush mob had been in fires before. They knew that the bark of the paperbark tree could slow the fire down and make bags to hold water but they needed big flocks of birds to carry the water bombs and, of course, the largest clans were the black and white cockatoos.

The two boys raised together were now fully grown. They knew the boss cockies would not agree to work together. The two brothers decided with their mothers that they would lead the clans. The four cockatoos returned to the nesting trees and everyone was so happy to see them return. They were surprised at how big and strong they had grown and they were bigger than most of the other birds in the flock. The mothers told them how peaceful it was

living on the other side of the forest and how the forest had helped them grow strong. They asked for the cockatoos' help to fight the fire.

In the meantime, everyone had gathered at the billabong. They soon had a stockpile of water bombs for the birds to carry. The larger birds started carrying the water bombs but they were so few in number they really needed the cockatoos.

All of a sudden, the sky was covered with black and white cockatoos led by the cockatoo brothers. Everyone worked as hard and as fast as they could. Flocks of cockatoos flew over the fire and the forest, releasing the water bombs. The two boss cockies heard the commotion and looked up to see the fire. They were missing the most important job of their life.

By this time, a large cloud of thick black smoke and ash had formed near the cockatoos' home. There was no going around it. The boss cockies were going to have to fly straight through it. Burning embers landed on their wings, burning some of their flying feathers. They only managed to find their way through the fire by flying together.

With everyone working together, they put out the fire and saved the forest. As the black and white cockatoos flew back to the billabong, they saw the two boss cockies standing face to face at the water's edge. They were really worried they were going to have another fight. The two boss cockies had realised how foolish they were. They agreed they would never fight again. Instead, they would look after the forest together.

Even though the fire was over, a thick grey ash fell like snowflakes all over the ground covering everything. The two boss cockies burst out laughing. There was no black or white cockatoo now. They were all grey. A great celebration ensued. From then on, everyone was taught the stories of the forest and followed the wisdom passed down through the generations. Everyone started visiting the forest again. It made them feel good and kept them strong.

One beautiful sunset some time later, the bush mob and the cockatoo clans had a healing ceremony in the forest. They remembered the story of the fire. They

promised they would never forget, and look after the ancient forest for evermore. The cockatoo clans were happy. The bush mob were happy. The children thrived and so did the forest.

Nearly finished.

I think it's really easy to forget what's important and fight for the wrong things. Sometimes we just fight for the sake of fighting. No one has the higher moral ground when it comes to looking after children and country. We all have a role and responsibility in this. We have to look after our country and our children for our nation to have a future. At the end of the day, we have a shared humanity. We mostly want the same things: to bring about the wellbeing of our children and our nation.

Given the magnitude of what happened in this country and what we have done to generations of children, we need the courage to commit to sustainable generational healing. Who is going to make sure that our children are held within the mind, the heart and spirit of family, culture, community and society in the right relationships with those positive images that they can look up to and aspire to? Who is going to give them the right story, not the wrong one that they're currently in at the moment? We must all take responsibility to raise children well so that maybe one day we can tell this story: Once upon a time there was a place where children were loved and safe to grow up as they should, happy, healthy, free to dream dreams and achieve brilliance.

Thank you.

Denis Moriarty
What a perfect way to end the conference.

Thank you to all of you. You make this event. We put it on, but it's your interactions and your attendance and the infection that you create that helps you go out into those communities and continue to change the world, so I want to end on that: Go change the world. Thank you.

ENDS

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