

FRONT ANNOUNCE: For International Women's Day 2018, CHETRE, the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation, has teamed up with RAWA, the Redfern Aboriginal Women's Alliance, to present a series of interviews with Indigenous women and one non-Aboriginal public health professional. CHETRE works to 'co-create intelligence for better health'. The theme of this International Women's Day is 'push for progress'. We'll be talking with our guests about their life and work and what it means for Indigenous women especially to Close the Gap.

SUZANNE: Hi, I'm Suzanne Ingram and it's my pleasure to bring you this anthology podcast series hosted by CHETRE and RAWA for International Women's Day. We'll be presenting you a week long series of short interviews with some pretty special Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and a pretty special ally. The theme for 2018 is #pressforprogress.

LYNDA-JUNE: I started off working in family law and I could see that kids were really struggling when they went through the primary sector through to the secondary sector and the dropout rates were alarming from an early year seven, that junior high school level so I thought to myself, no I could actually reach these kids.

SUZANNE: I'm speaking with Lynda-June Coe. Growing up on Erambie Mission, Cowra, in a Wiradjuri family very well known for their activism in justice for Aboriginal people, Lynda-June talks about why she chose the path to become a secondary school teacher and her valuable work with young people, connection and country.

---

SUZANNE: I want to ask you about your work in education and your interest in sovereignty - how do these go together?

LYNDA-JUNE: Okay well education for me started off as a child, of course. Coming from a prominently politically active family I was raised around dinner table Black politics, so everything that was happening at the community grassroots level right through to the national spectrum of politics was a discussion at the table. So, everything around land rights, native title, these were just familiar terms, words, that I was raised and I took it upon myself in my mid-twenties to not pursue a career in law but to be at the opposite end of the stick and contribute to our youth in the areas of Aboriginal education.

I found going home straight after I graduated from the University of Sydney to be beneficial not only to the kids in my community but to myself in that everything that I was learning I could put into practice starting with, of course, identity and connections to country and where we've come from pre-contact traditional society to contemporary Aboriginal society today and sovereignty kind of fits into all of that in that I've acknowledged my role as an educator.

---

SUZANNE: How easy was it for you to kind of em yeah, maybe not law, think I'll do it this way?

LYNDA-JUNE: Yeah I um well I could see, I identified a need. I started off working in family law and I could see that kids were really struggling when they went through the primary sector through to the secondary sector and the dropout rates were alarming from an early year seven, that junior high school level so I thought to myself, no I could actually reach these kids and reach these minds in that them, they themselves are sovereign beings, they are custodians of this country and that they have something to be proud of and empower themselves within that identity. I was very much supported by my family in

choosing to become a teacher. I'm the first high school teacher of my family so yeah, no, it was new grounds for them as well and no I, I think being a teacher has slotted in well amongst the lawyers in my family

---

SUZANNE: Do you get the support in the system for the direction that you're wanting to take your education of those students?

LYNDA JUNE: The support was there, definitely, I found to some degree. The curriculum itself is very broad so you can maneuver it and localise it as much as you like. The beautiful thing at this present time is that Black politics is on the national agenda and that our kids are a bit more aware of what's going on.

---

SUZANNE: Do you think racism has changed its face a little bit?

LYNDA-JUNE: [long pause – soft voice] The importance of it all is that we can relate with one another coming yes I've been through a tertiary education but language is key in being able to break down those barriers. A lot of our kids still feel alienated in the education system, a lot of our kids still feel disempowered within themselves because of their identity. I went beyond my control to create a culturally safe space within my classrooms but also embodied that within their community as well and that my teacher hat was 24/7, so, no, it's about creating that culturally safe space to foster that strong identity, strong connections to country and to want them to learn about their history where they've come from and where the possibilities of where they can go into the future.

---

SUZANNE: Why a 'No' campaign on recognising constitutional reform?

---

LYNDA-JUNE: The grassroots sovereignty movement has always kind of been silenced when it comes to such organisations like Recognise. Ownership of sovereignty is always people-based it can't be done in a governmental structure so right then in there it's kind of just it's contradictory to the actual definitions of sovereignty and self-determination. Sovereignty is ... recognises that we have always upheld our law and that because we are in the deficit of not having a treaty that we still to this very day hold sovereignty in our country. Our law is the only law of this country we hold root title to our lands and we are under illegal occupation until a treaty is addressed by the British crown or the government of Australia.

---

SUZANNE: That then goes to cos treaty obviously is a big part of this statement from the heart so what does the statement from the heart signify do you think?

LYNDA-JUNE: The statement of the heart I believe lacks the real oomph. It's a toothless tiger, it doesn't call for the substance of a treaty which is justice, which is reparations. If you look at international models around treaty agreements that were, or a truth and justice commission, there's always that component of reparations. The Uluru statement doesn't address that. It still leads towards an appeasing model for governments. Whether we like it or not, if we're going to do some truth-telling this component of treaty--reparations for past injustices of our mobs--needs to be openly discussed and there needs to be some kind of negotiation on what looks like some kind of, some form of justice for our people and what does it look like going into, for the future generations to follow

---

SUZANNE: Yep, and that's what you have been organising with Wiradjuri mob, do you want to talk a little bit about that?

LYNDA-JUNE: Oh yeah sure, on the 25th of November I organised a Wiradjuri gathering up home around a beautiful big gum tree next to the offices of my grandmother who I love and adored and I thank for her teachings as well as a strong matriarch, so yes so it was about informing our mob on the importance of bringing back a united front as 80,000 years of a clan system that was successful up until 230 years ago but can still be repaired and revitalized as part of our own governance structure and having authority over our country.

The other key discussion of that day was identity, Wiradjuri identity who are the Wiradjuri people. We need to start looking at as a point, initial point of business of Wiradjuri business is bringing back our own self-identification model and that the federal government no longer determines who is Wiradjuri but we ourselves are an authority body over the Wiradjuri nation. So it's about people, it's about our land and it's about our law.

---

OUTRO: To find out more and support Lynda-June and the young black movement known as Fighting in Solidarity Towards Treaty - FISTT – follow them on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/fisttmovement](http://www.facebook.com/fisttmovement)

BACK ANNOUNCE: This podcast was made possible by the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation at the University of NSW and brought to you by RAWA, Redfern Aboriginal Women's Alliance. Sound engineer is Asher Milgate, and it was produced by Melissa Bernstein and Suzanne Ingram. Executive Producer Evelyne de Leeuw.

We pay our respects to the Aboriginal nations upon whose land we live, laugh, love and work.