



Episode 4: Kai Noonan

Transcript

Kai Noonan

[instrumental music plays] And I think many women, children, uh, trans and gender-diverse people, queer people, people of all minority populations would probably feel safer. And so, I don't think there'd be anybody left out of the benefits of this change in 2050.

Female voiceover

Welcome to Voices Towards 2050: Ending Gender-Based Violence, the official podcast series of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. Please be aware that this podcast discusses topics related to domestic, family and sexual violence, which may be distressing for some listeners. Support is available. If you need assistance, please contact 1800RESPECT or reach out to your local support services. Thank you for joining us.

Micaela Cronin

I'm very pleased to welcome my guest on today's episode of the podcast, Kai Noonan. Thank you for joining me for this conversation about our hopes for the future.

Kai Noonan

Oh, thanks for having me, Micaela.

Micaela Cronin

First of all, I want to start by acknowledging that today I'm on the lands of Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, where I live and work, and pay my deep respects to their elders, past and present, for their care of these lands and for their generosity and wisdom. My commitment is to work and live as an ally in this role and always.

So, Kai, let me briefly introduce you and your work. Kai Noonan is the Director of Sexual Domestic and Family Violence Prevention at LGBTIQ+ Health Australia, where their primary focus is on building awareness and advocating for policy changes that prevent and respond to violence within LGBTIQ+ communities. Kai has got over 15 years of experience in the not-for-profit sector, with the last 10 years delivering and managing programs and services in sexual domestic and family violence. They're a member of the 1800RESPECT National Sector Advisory Group, the National Women's Safety Alliance, and the National Centre for Child Sexual Abuse. Last year, in 2024, Kai was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the LGBTIQ+ community and to the domestic, family and sexual violence sector. Kai, thanks so much again for joining me.

Kai Noonan

Pleasure. Thank you.

Micaela Cronin

So I wanna start by asking you to talk a little bit about what motivates you to strive for a different future.

Kai Noonan

I think what motivates me is really just a strong sense of justice, um... and a strong sense of, of right and wrong. Even though I don't believe in binaries like right or wrong, but I, I was raised Catholic, and I was definitely raised believing that there is a right and a wrong way of, of doing and being. And I think that's really stayed with me, even though, like I said, rationally, I don't believe the... I, I believe that humans are more complex than just right or wrong or good and bad. But I was, I was bullied in both primary school and



high school. After that, I came out as gay, and even later still, I came out as gender-diverse or non-binary. So although all of those experiences were hard and they are sometimes still hard, I'm actually quite grateful for them, because they really instilled a sense of, I guess, ethics and empathy, I suppose. I often, um, I often say that being queer is the best thing that ever happened to me, because it made me who I am today. And I'm 41, and I think I can finally say that I'm fairly happy with the person that I am today. But a lot of, a lot of that happened as a result of being queer and my experience of being different, being treated less than other people, being bullied and controlled and experiencing violence. And I think now I just, I just can't stand violence. I'm very, I'm very sensitive to bullying behaviours. And so, I think I just do this work and I'm motivated to do this work probably just 'cause I'm trying to stand up for what I believe in. I believe hurting and controlling another person or a group of people is wrong. And if you believe that something is wrong, then you should probably just do something about it. But I will add though that there are definitely times when I just wanna bury my head in the sand and hide, or I have wild fantasies of living off-grid in the bush with no concept of... what's happening in the outside world. And I think as I get older, I'm closer and closer to living like that and doing that. But for now, I think I'll, I'll stand up and, and do what I do while I still have the energy to do that.

Micaela Cronin

Good on you, Kai. And whatever any of us around you can support you, I agree. We need... I, I have fantasies of becoming either a florist or a yoga teacher, something-

Kai Noonan

Yeah

Micaela Cronin

... either giving, giving people joy, um, because it is hard to stay with this, this work. So I, I think that there is enormous respect for the work that, that you do, and value in that. And I think the insights that you're bringing, I think you're right. The insights that we bring, it's really interesting to the way, listening to the way you answered that question, I found that, um, and particularly the challenge about different. I think, for me, some of what you've just described, that not, not seeing things as binaries and recognizing that actually the answer is in diversity is, for me, is, is a chink of where the answer lies.

Kai Noonan

Mm-hmm.

Micaela Cronin

So, what I want to do in this conversation is imagine that future. So, if our national commitment to ending gender-based violence in a generation is successful, what would your vision of what 2050 look like?

Kai Noonan

Can I say that I... Like, I don't think we'll end gender-based violence in a generation, not, not for everyone anyway. But I do think..... that we will end it for many people. Many people won't experience violence between now and then because of the work that's being done. Cycles of violence are being broken. Red flags are being recognized. People are getting help earlier than they otherwise would have. Children are growing up with a greater sense of safety and predictability than they might have otherwise done. And so, we are ending gender-based violence in a generation for some people, and I think that's an important win that we need to celebrate, even if by 2050 we haven't ended it for everyone. Saying we'll end gender-based violence in a generation is ambitious... but I know I need that ambition and I think I'm, I'm not the only person that needs that ambition and ambitious goals because otherwise, we can feel so powerless and so overwhelmed in so much uncertainty and complexity. When we talked about, you know, not, not liking binaries and good and bad, I think often, it's because we're afraid of that complexity.

Micaela Cronin

Yes.

Kai Noonan



Um-

Micaela Cronin

Yep

Kai Noonan

... and we wanna pull away from that complexity and find an easy way to categorize things. I think we do that naturally as humans. And so, even if 2050 is an ambitious goal, it is a goal and it is something that we can kind of box our work into to strive for. And that, I think that's really important. But 2050 without gender-based violence, this is one. Well, you and I wouldn't have to live as a hermit in the bush anymore with our heads-

Micaela Cronin

No

Kai Noonan

... buried in the sand.

Micaela Cronin

Yes.

Kai Noonan

Um, you'll be out of work so you can be a yoga teaching florist.

Micaela Cronin

Excellent.

Kai Noonan

[laughs] But look, I, I think personally, I'd feel safer to walk the streets at night. I would go back to my local park to go running. I would not feel so afraid to take up space in social media, for example. And I think many women, children, uh, trans and gender-diverse people, queer people, and people of all minority populations would probably feel safer and we'd live longer and healthier and richer lives. I think that, that 2050 when we've seen an end to gender-based violence, then that would be an end of hom- end to homophobia and transphobia, uh, inter-interphobia and all of the violence and the stereotypes and assumptions that come with these, these phobias. And speaking for LGBTQ+ communities, we just wouldn't have as high rates of suicide or as low health outcomes.

Micaela Cronin

Yeah.

Kai Noonan

But I also wanna say it's not just women, children and minority populations. We would also see men who are safer. Yes, men are mostly the perpetrators of gender-based violence, but they're also the victims of it too. And so, I don't think there'd be anybody left out of the benefits of this change in 2050.

Micaela Cronin

So if you can travel through time to visit this place, which is extraordinary the way you've described it very articulately, what would, what would you be interested in? What would you be, what would you wanna know? Who would you talk to? What questions would you have?

Kai Noonan

Oh, I mean, knowing me, I'd try and talk to everybody and ask everything.

Micaela Cronin

[laughs]



Kai Noonan

I, I wanna know first what were the large catalysts for change, like what really motivated-

Micaela Cronin

Yes

Kai Noonan

... people to change and how can we make that change process smoother? One of the things that happens when oppressed people make social and legal advancements is that there's backlash.

Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm.

Kai Noonan

And I would wanna know the kinda warts and all of it, yes, we may have gotten here, but how could we have gotten there in a smoother way where there's less backlash and resistance? Because that backlash and resistance can be damaging, it can be lethal. So I'd wanna know, yay, we got here, but how can we do it in a way that was smoother, that protected people along the way? I mean, there's such a broad spectrum of work happening in this space, right? Like from primary prevention through to recovery, early childhood through to behaviour change programs. And I'd really just wanna know if there is an area that had the most impact or the most change so that we can focus on resources there and get there quicker. And look, I'd also wanna know what the world was like where you have more women, gender-diverse people and minority populations in positions of influence. And I'd wanna know what that looked like. Because by ending gender-based violence, we give people the freedom to move into those spaces. And I just wanna know how we move people into those spaces sooner

Kai Noonan

so that... Because ending gender-based violence is really ending so many other forms of violence, other forms of violence would come crumbling down. And so, just looking at how we can work across all those other forms of violence and work with advocates against racism and advocates against capitalism and see how we can all work together for this one real cause, which is ending one personal group of people's power over another.

Micaela Cronin

Yeah. I think that there's some really important things, and wouldn't it be fabulous to be able to, to go ahead and find out how we can smooth the path there? I think that really, Kai, your point about there is always backlash and how do we think ahead? I think some of the... One of the things I find really interesting is that safety by design kind of principles, how do we take those-

Kai Noonan

Mm-hmm

Micaela Cronin

... principles to any change? How do we make sure we assume and know that people will... Wherever we make change, there are unintended consequences. There can be backlash. How do we protect people from that? Is something we need to be very much more mindful of than I think we have been.

Kai Noonan

Mm-hmm.

Micaela Cronin

And really planning for that.

Kai Noonan



And one thing that I often, like I, I find myself saying more and more often is that LGBTQ communities are often considered a bit of an add-on in the, the fight to end gender-based violence.

Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm.

Kai Noonan

When actually I feel like what's happening in our communities both, um, when we're speaking to backlash, I think about what's happening to trans women at the moment who are really copping the brunt of a lot of, a lot of violence. And I think about the lessons that we're learning and the, the work and the activism and the resistance happening within our communities. And I think about how we can use that to benefit all women and... all communities in this fight for ending gender-based violence in the future. And I just think if we can embed the experiences and the voices of all minority populations, because Aboriginal First Nations people have been going through the same thing for hundreds of years since colonization.

Micaela Cronin

Sure.

Kai Noonan

What can we learn? How do we build programs around that knowledge and experience? Because we know, we know backlash.

Micaela Cronin

Yes.

Kai Noonan

We've experienced it. We're still experiencing it.

Micaela Cronin

Yes.

Kai Noonan

Um, and we can just learn from each other and share so much knowledge.

Micaela Cronin

And look, I think that's critical, Kai. I think... I mean, I've worked in the sector for over 30 years, and I know I have said before that we should put at the centre communities that are most experiencing the issues, but I've never believed it as much as I do now, and I've seen in this role, I think you're right. What we need to learn from those communities, that are often hardest hit and most at risk and most unsafe, is that they have learnt ways to... They have knowledge and wisdom. And planning around addressing services, designing things to meet their needs, actually need, really needs to be at the centre if we're gonna get it right.

Kai Noonan

Absolutely. And when we're free of a lot of the constraints of, you know, when society says, "Well, you don't fit in this box, so therefore you're outside the box." Sometimes that gives us the freedom to create our own relationships, to create our own gender stereotypes, to create our own way of being in the world. And we can also offer a vision of what it's like to not be so tightly constrained and policed by gender stereotypes and norms. I think if you talk about what that 2050 would look like with an end of gender-based violence, it will also look fun. Like, men wearing nail polish and fun dresses would be wonderful.

Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm.

Kai Noonan

You know?



Micaela Cronin

Yeah.

Kai Noonan

Along with, with other benefits, like, if feminised industries like childcare and social services would get paid better and female sports stars would be paid better and night clubs would be safer and we'd see a reduction in steroid use, and, um, you know, we wouldn't be scared sending our kids to daycare or letting them on the internet because so much stress would be reduced for all people. We'd all have a greater sense of freedom to express whatever gender we want, to embark on relationships that feel good, not just the relationships we're told to embark on. And so our communities can offer an alternative or a different perspective that I think can show people the vision of what a life free from a lot of constraints can be. And that's a celebration, and that's a sense of pride, and that's individuality.

Micaela Cronin

Absolutely. I'm gonna finish by asking you an impossible question, not that the others have been-

Kai Noonan

[laughs] I was just gonna say, "The others have been-" [laughs]

Micaela Cronin

The others haven't been easy. My impossible question is... So you have gone to the future and you have seen and descri- you've described it beautifully. Kai, if you could come back, what's the one thing? Right? You know that go to the future, you come back and you buy shares in something or you bet on, you know, a horse race. What, which none of us would do. What is the one thing, what's the one thing that you think, from your perspective... There are many one things from multiple perspectives, but what's the one thing you would do right now to kickstart it?

Kai Noonan

I'd really shift focus to childhood, early childhood in these spaces, and I'd completely revamp those spaces. I think we could draw a clear link between the way that we raise our kids and gender-based violence. And I don't think that, I think that link is sort of quietly known, but not really explicitly named. Um, so that means introducing parenting programs and campaigns, um, fixing our home care, youth justice, just completely reimagining childcare and the education system to teach children about communication and emotional regulation and self-worth. Our systems, the way we raise kids, would not use shame and exclusion as forms of discipline. We would teach our kids to tap into empathy and kindness, and to... We, as parents and caregivers and teachers, would prioritize nurturing children over correcting behaviours. Like, it is weird to me that when you graduate from school, you will know more about ancient Egypt than how your own brain and central nervous system functions. You leave high school knowing how to write an essay, but not how to have a difficult conversation. And for LGBTIQ communities, because that's who I, I guess, am equipped to, to speak on behalf of, improving our school systems would mean that LGBTIQ+ kids would feel safe at school to be themselves, that them and their peers would not have to buy into gender stereotypes. Our kids would see themselves reflected back to them in stories, stories that are read at school, and the healthy relationships programs that they sit through so that when they are older, they know that violence against them is wrong. They know what healthy relationships look like, and more importantly, their peers do too. Their peers would know that it is wrong to hurt, judge, be violent, discriminate. And I think, just going back to all children as a whole, we need programs in early childcare all the way through to the end of school about our relationships and, and, and our bodies and our emotions should be central to our school curriculum, not add-ons, not afterthoughts, not occasional programs, not opt-in programs that schools can choose to, to ignore or not. And I think adults, many adults who use violence or who experience violence, it is those crippling insecurities and, and the inability to regulate emotions that lead to violence. Not always, and it certainly doesn't excuse violence, but in many situations I think it does, and I think healthy, connected kids who understand their bodies and can have hard conversations and can have healthy relationships is a future without violence. I really do.



Micaela Cronin

Mm-hmm. Kai, that absolutely gives me hope, the way you describe that. And I completely agree with you that that is one of the most critical things in terms of the way we think about investing in children and young people in a diff- investing in all the different ways that that word means, to ch- is the way to change the future. Thank you so much for the conversation today. It's been very rich and wise, and I really appreciate your time and all the work that you do.

Kai Noonan

Thank you. I appreciate the work you do too, and for giving us a, a platform to have these conversations that are really important. And I can't wait to hear what everybody else has said, uh, on their episodes too. [uplifting music]

Female voiceover

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[End transcript]