



Episode 15: Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine

Transcript

00:00:00,200 --> 00:00:18,560 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

[music] We have to find ways to maintain that recognition that this violence is a crisis that we can never accept, while also holding hope that we can change it.

00:00:18,560 --> 00:00:50,700 [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.

00:00:50,700 --> 00:01:02,560 [Micaela Cronin]

I'm really pleased to welcome my guest on today's episode of the podcast. Tessa, thanks so much for joining me for this conversation about how we can shape a future free from gender-based violence.

00:01:02,560 --> 00:01:04,819 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Great to be talking with you, Michaela.

00:01:04,819 --> 00:02:21,720 [Micaela Cronin]

First, I wanna start by acknowledging that today, I'm on the lands of the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation, and pay my deep respects to their elders past and present for their care of these lands, and extend that respect to elders across the country. My commitment is to work and live as an ally in this role in all ways. My guest today is Dr. Tessa Boyd-Caine. Tessa is the CEO of ANROWS, the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, and someone whose work I have admired for many years. For those people not familiar with ANROWS, it's the national body that was established to produce and share evidence to end domestic, family and sexual violence, and plays a critical role in guiding all of our national efforts. Tessa has more than two decades of leadership across health, justice and social policy. Before joining ANROWS, she was the founding CEO of Health Justice Australia, deputy CEO of the Australian Council of Social Services, and Australia's inaugural Fulbright Professional Scholar in not-for-profit leadership. She's also a criminologist, a board chair, and has demonstrated her deep commitment to centering evidence and lived experience in systems change. Tessa, I'm so pleased to have a chance to talk to you about our vision for the future today.

00:02:21,720 --> 00:02:23,580 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Hello. Great to be here.

00:02:23,580 --> 00:02:30,660 [Micaela Cronin]

So Tessa, let's start by telling me a little bit about what motivates you to do this work, to strive for a different future.

00:02:30,660 --> 00:04:01,340 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Look, I can't really think of a more important contribution to be making right now, and that's really about ensuring that the directions we set as a country to end domestic, family and sexual violence are informed by evidence about how we can make that difference. And I guess, you know, y- you talked a bit about my background, and I've seen the long shadow that gender-based violence casts on people and families and communities from so many different lenses. From my early training as a criminologist, to working across health and justice and community sectors. And I guess I see that right now, we've got an opportunity not just to respond to people's needs, but to really shape a different future. And, and that's what drives me. And



I thought long and hard about taking on this role. All around me, I, I see the impacts of trauma and of lived experience really in every conversation I have in this work. And I always assume that people have direct knowledge of the issues that we work on. So it was really, yeah, it was really important to me to be ready professionally in terms of what I can bring to the role, and also emotionally, to contribute the leadership that is needed, both at ANROWS and in the work generally, to improve women's and children's safety. And to see that really critical outcome as part of achieving gender equality, which I think is change that we all need to see. But I really, I really see that the opportunity for evidence is, is what gives me hope, because I can see it as a tool for the change that we're working towards.

00:04:01,340 --> 00:04:50,000 [Micaela Cronin]

Mm. That's so important, Tessa. And there's so much in there I would love to unpack. It's a much longer conversation. I think the point that you made at the beginning about the long shadow, and many of the conversations I've had with people about ending gender-based violence have talked about this issue impacts on so many policy areas, and is at the heart of many of the things that we are trying to change in other ways. I think the other point you make about leadership too, and being prepared, and being supported in that. And part of the reason that I wanted to start this podcast and talking about the future was that sense of leadership around hope for the future, at the same time as real clarity around just how challenging the situation is, and what the evidence is telling us we need to be doing.

00:04:50,000 --> 00:04:58,140 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Look, the evidence is giving us signs of progress. So we're not where we need to be, but we're not where we were.

00:04:58,140 --> 00:04:58,480 [Micaela Cronin]

Mm.

00:04:58,480 --> 00:06:06,620 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

And I think being able to understand, you know, yes, we are still seeing, uh, we see levels of harm that are not acceptable ever, in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence. And it is mostly women and children who are harmed in that context. And some women and children are being killed, and we can never accept that. At the same time, the evidence shows there are signs of progress. In terms of intimate partner violence, for example, we're seeing decreasing rates there. We're seeing increasing publicly aware communities. We see people recognizing abuse earlier and reaching out for support. And we see incredible potential in young people who are really leading cultural change, speaking out, holding their peers to account, bringing new narratives about what healthy and safe relationships look like. And so we have to find ways to maintain that recognition that this violence is a crisis that we can never accept, while also holding hope that we can change it. And that the work that is being done right across communities, across services, and at the levels of government, that that work is important, and that we need to hold hope for, for the impact of that work.

00:06:06,620 --> 00:06:43,352 [Micaela Cronin]

That's such an important but tricky balance, isn't it? Uh, and, uh, it's ... In this role, it's one of the things I think about all the time, is how do we keep shining a light on the unacceptable levels of violence that are still occurring?... while at the same time acknowledging what has, where we've, how far we've come, and holding onto hope for the future. Because I know, I mean one of the things I really strike often is, it's f- for some people who are facing this all the time, facing into addressing domestic, family and sexual violence all the time in their day jobs, it is hard to hold onto hope and to get that balance right.

00:06:43,352 --> 00:06:43,392 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Mm-hmm.

00:06:43,392 --> 00:06:47,212 [Micaela Cronin]

So I think the way you've articulated that is really important.



00:06:47,212 --> 00:07:24,952 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

You know, for people working in this space, for lived experience first and foremost, for the victims and survivors who show up every day to continue contributing and often, um, bringing the wisdom of their experience to change that experience for others. And of course we know that progress is not evenly distributed. We know that there are women and children living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, older women, LGBTQ+ communities who are disproportionately affected by that experience. And so yeah, I think we need to hold multiple things at the same time. But we do need to have that hope that change is possible.

00:07:24,952 --> 00:07:25,111 [Micaela Cronin]

Mm-hmm.

00:07:25,111 --> 00:07:29,272 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

And I think the evidence is a really key tool for that hope.

00:07:29,272 --> 00:07:46,272 [Micaela Cronin]

So that's a really good segue into my next question. If our national commitment to ending gender-based violence in a generation is successful, so let's say all of the efforts that, and the pathway we're talking about, has been successful, what would your vision for 2050 be?

00:07:46,272 --> 00:08:10,332 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

This is such an important question. I really love it, Michaela. Look, I wanna see a country where violence is no longer an expected part of women's and children's lives, and where our responses to people's safety are not determined by other factors in those lives. And I'm thinking about factors like postcode, like identity in some of the ways that I just talked about.

00:08:10,332 --> 00:08:11,012 [Micaela Cronin]

Oh.

00:08:11,012 --> 00:08:57,572 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Privilege. You know, that, that we have access to the service responses that people need at the point in time that they need them and in ways that are responsive to the whole of life for that person. But I also think that means that as a country we've brought together the different forms of expertise that enable that change. And I'm thinking about lived experience as a key form of evidence alongside the kinds of research that we and others do, and that we're leveraging all of that to ensure that our systems work together, not in silos, and that they recognize the intersecting factors in people's lives that shape experience and therefore that shape service responses and directions in policy and programs.

00:08:57,572 --> 00:09:17,932 [Micaela Cronin]

So let's just say that's been successful. We have managed to bring all of those things together, and we send you into the future, into this vision of yours of 2050 to spend a few days. What would you wanna know? What questions would you have? Where would you go looking for evidence that 2050 is different, is the future we're striving for?

00:09:17,932 --> 00:09:47,412 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

So if I'm in 2050 and we have achieved this world free from gendered violence, the first thing I wanna know is how did we shift power so that people with lived experience weren't just being consulted but were actively empowered and centred to bring their expertise to this change that we've achieved? I really wanna know what we've done to ensure that every child in the country continues to grow up knowing what safety feels like.

00:09:47,412 --> 00:09:48,092 [Micaela Cronin]

Mm-hmm.



00:09:48,092 --> 00:10:30,172 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

I wanna know how we're hearing children's voices. I wanna know how we're working in ways that are appropriate for six and eight-year-olds, different to 14-year-olds, different to 17 and 18-year-olds so that we're understanding children and young people through their life course. And I'm assuming that by 2050, we've made progress on changing some of the systems that currently are upholding or enabling violence. And so I wanna know what's the next stage of that systemic change and what did we learn along the way that is really critical to that achievement and that we hold even as we might need to adapt or think about new directions for the work ahead? And I guess I'm, I'm thinking about the questions that are gonna keep us honest.

00:10:30,172 --> 00:10:30,492 [Micaela Cronin]

Mm-hmm.

00:10:30,492 --> 00:10:58,912 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

And it sort of takes us back to that, you know, that point earlier that we're not where we were, but we're not where we need to be. And even if we've achieved a violence-free life by 2050, we're gonna have to work hard to maintain that. And so we can't ever take the change for granted. We have to fight really hard for it, and I wanna be asking the questions that hold us to account and that see everyone needing to play a role to maintaining that future.

00:10:58,912 --> 00:11:21,692 [Micaela Cronin]

So you come back from the future armed with all of that knowledge, right? What it, the things that we did that really shifted change. You've got the ability to make any change necessary. From your perspective, from the perspective that you hold now, what's the one thing you would do right now to help us work towards achieving that violence-free 2050?

00:11:21,692 --> 00:12:28,860 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

The most significant thing I think we could do right now is to move from thinking about individuals to understanding that it's structural change that is gonna make the biggest leaps forward. And so, you know, I think that looks like moving from individual policies to thinking about whole systems. You know, if we're thinking about children and young people as victims and survivors in their own right, we're thinking about the response they need now and the support they need to not go on and use violence in their future lives. We're connecting all of that through early childhood education, through school, through health, through other service settings, and through community conversations and through the, the strength and the resilience of our families and our community structures. So that's an example of where we move from thinking about, uh, you know, victims and survivors, in this case children or young people as individuals in their own right, to understanding that they sit within a system. And that's where I think we can make the biggest change. You know, there's so many examples from pilot..... service models to becoming large scale program-

00:12:28,860 --> 00:12:28,870 [Micaela Cronin]

Yeah

00:12:28,870 --> 00:13:24,300 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

... responses. And, and we're seeing that in, in a whole range of ways at the moment. We're seeing states working together to reform working with children checks. Just one, one tiny part, but a really important part of keeping children safe, particularly in, in service environments. We're seeing growing interest in how we invest in long-term data collection. We're seeing, uh, you know, efforts at cross sector collaboration around, uh, working with people using violence or integrating service models so that, uh, those services connect around people's lives. And they're not small tweaks. You know, I think they're real signs of what's possible, but they are a possibility to move from thinking about ourselves as individuals and thinking about, you know, victims and survivors and people using violence and practitioners in services all as individuals, to thinking about a connected system that is working in a coordinated and a coherent way.



00:13:24,300 --> 00:14:05,540 [Micaela Cronin]

And Tessa, that's one of the things that when I think about this really gives me hope too, is that those kinds of systems changes are in some ways easier than individual attitudinal changes, right? They're, they're things that government have the levers to control. Now, changing systems is not simple. I'm not saying that at all, but it is within our power, and as you've said, I think we've both seen significant evidence that those systems are very willing and able and starting to move. And I think it's a role that ANROWS in moving to that future really can and is playing a leadership role about shining a light on that and what the evidence is telling us.

00:14:05,540 --> 00:14:19,890 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Th- that's right, and I think it's an invitation for us to think about our own roles and our own power differently. You know, one of the threads through all of my work has been to think about the people who make up systems 'cause if you think about-

00:14:19,890 --> 00:14:19,939 [Micaela Cronin]

Mm

00:14:19,939 --> 00:15:30,420 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

... systems as these big amorphous sort of bodies, they're impenetrable, but actually we all make up systems. We're all active in them in different ways, and that's the power that we all have to pull a lever, to be a lever, to be part of that change. And I think that's also where you can hold that hope that systems change is possible because there's no question it's where we can get the greatest impact. And, you know, in the evidence base, there are whole areas of system level recommendations that are, are ready to be implemented, are ready to be experimented with, that can really make a huge difference. And I think that's the, the way of seeing hope, not as the opposite of urgency. You know, still we keep that this is a crisis that requires all of our efforts, but hope helps us all see a role that we play in the vision to end violence in a generation. And I think, you know, the role that ANROWS plays in developing and marshalling that evidence is also in helping people use it to make sure that that evidence is practical and can be applied so that every step we take gives us the best chance of, of the change that we wanna see and the end of that violence.

00:15:30,420 --> 00:15:34,810 [Micaela Cronin]

Tessa, I love that. Hope isn't the opposite of urgency. We need both.

00:15:34,810 --> 00:15:35,769 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Mm-hmm.

00:15:35,769 --> 00:15:50,220 [Micaela Cronin]

And I think the other thing that gives me hope is that, as you've said, people are systems and in every system, there are people who are trying to drive change, so thank you for the role that you play in that, Tessa, and I look forward to our ongoing collaborations.

00:15:50,220 --> 00:15:56,280 [Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine]

Thanks very much, Michaela. [instrumental music]

00:15:56,339 --> 00:16:49,520 [Female Voiceover]

Thank you for listening to Voices Towards 2050: Ending Gender-Based Violence. Subscribe and join us for future conversations as we work together to achieve a future free from domestic, family, and sexual violence. To learn more about the Commission, visit our website at dfsvc.gov.au. If you need support, contact 1800 RESPECT or call 1800 737 732. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, you can call 13 YARN or 13 9276. The views expressed in this podcast are those of the guests and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or the Commission. [instrumental music]

[End transcript]