

*From the Heart: Findings
from the in-depth interviews*

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We would like to express our deep appreciation to the interviewees who generously gave their time and shared their personal experiences, providing many valuable insights about truth-telling and engagement / disengagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories. Thank you for sharing your truth with us.

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Background to the in-depth interviews

The in-depth interview component of this research project aimed to gather more detailed qualitative information about understandings of truth-telling and barriers to and enablers of participation in truth-telling and engagement with Aboriginal history than could be drawn from the survey.

Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with survey respondents who had indicated their willingness to participate in an interview. A large amount of relevant and interesting information was generated even from this relatively small sample of interviewees, and we recommend undertaking more interviews with a broader range of participants in the next phase of the project.

All First Nations survey respondents who had indicated that they were willing to be interviewed were invited to participate in an interview (20 people); two interviews were conducted with participants from this group. A sample of non-Indigenous survey respondents who had indicated they were willing to be interviewed were invited based on the demographic information which they had provided in their survey responses. This selective sampling was undertaken to ensure some diversity of gender, age, education level, country of birth, geographic location and language background amongst interviewees. 24 non-Indigenous respondents were invited to participate in an interview, with eight interviews conducted with participants from this group.

Interviewees were sent the draft transcript of their interview and given the opportunity to edit, correct or redact information. All interview transcripts were anonymised. Interviewees were also sent a draft copy of the preliminary findings from the interviews and invited to provide feedback.

The demographic details of the participants in the in-depth interviews are outlined on the following page, followed by thematic analysis of the interview findings.

Demographic details of interviewees

	Gender		Geographic location				Language/s spoken at home	
	Male	Female	Capital city	Regional city	Regional town	Rural town	English	LOTE
<i>Indigeneity</i>								
<i>Aboriginal*</i>	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	-	-	-	2 (100%)	2 (100%)	-
<i>Non-Indigenous</i>	3 (30%)	5 (50%)	4 (50%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	8 (100%)	-

<i>Indigeneity</i>	Age							Education level		
	25-29	35-39	40-44	45-49	60-64	65-69	70+	University qualification	Post-secondary qualification, finished Year 12	Post-secondary qualification, did not finish Year 12
<i>Aboriginal*</i>	-	-	-	-	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	-	1 (50%)	-	1 (50%)
<i>Non-Indigenous</i>	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	-	1 (12.5%)	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	-

*Nb. Both of the First Nations people interviewed identified as Aboriginal people.

1. Findings relating to truth-telling

What is truth-telling?

Interviewees were asked what the term truth-telling meant to them.

For First Nations respondents, truth-telling was seen as an everyday practice; as one interviewee commented, “I think it's every day. It's every day. If I really want to think about that it is every day and in every conversation we have, everyone is speaking their truth based on their lived experience, their gender, their life experience, their knowledge.” (Interview with ST) This interviewee later commented, “I can't take my culture, my lived experience, out of my words... my personal integrity as an Aboriginal woman is fundamental and guides how I say and what I say and how I engage.” Her truth-telling was based on “my lived experience of being ostracised and being oppressed as well, and I need to validate those because they guide me on why I feel and view the world the way I am.” (Interview with ST) A male Aboriginal interviewee commented “I try to get people to understand that it's coming from the heart what I'm telling and I charge non-Aboriginal people with a responsibility of listening and learning... We don't make this stuff up.” (Interview with GM) One non-Indigenous interviewee also spoke of truth-telling being incorporated into everyday practices and needing to be something that people always held in their minds, to “start living it.” (Interview with AG)

Truth-telling was described by Aboriginal interviewees as a responsibility to community: “In my job as a CEO, the board of directors and the committee gave me the opportunity and the responsibility to actually speak on behalf of them so I can't be seen in any forum not telling the truth because I have the responsibility of others that I'm speaking for.” (Interview with GM) This included the responsibility to speak truth to power, to accurately represent the interests and needs of the Aboriginal community to non-Indigenous authorities or decision-makers (Interview with GM). One Aboriginal interviewee highlighted the importance of these First Nations' perspectives; “being the Aboriginal person where our voice has not been heard and other people speaking on our behalf all the time is huge.” (Interview with ST) These comments have resonance with one of the findings from the literature review, which highlighted accountability as a key feature of First Nations storytelling, identifying that “the storyteller must feel a sense of intellectual and often spiritual responsibility to the audience they speak to”; listeners also have responsibilities as “witnesses to these stories of pain, healing, and transformation” (Sium & Ritskes 2013, p. viii).

Relationality was highlighted as a key feature of truth-telling by one Aboriginal interviewee; “Truth telling is about understanding everybody has their own view on a circumstance and to acknowledge that it could be different from somebody else. So it's based on a lived experience, it's based on their personal, professional experience but also depending on what context. If we're talking about Aboriginal community context, it's about how you understand and navigate at that local level and your connections, your relationships and just you being an Aboriginal person.” (Interview with ST)

One Aboriginal interviewee commented that truth-telling was not about blame; for this interviewee it was important that “both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people take responsibility to improve the relationship and not be intimidated, not be shy with people, don't think that Aboriginal people are going to come and get your house, or the Voice is going to overturn this or overturn that, but actually be better informed.” (Interview with GM)

In responding to a question about what truth-telling meant, one non-Indigenous interviewee commented, “it's one of three key parts of the Uluru Statement, and it's a very important and I think quite overlooked element of reconciliation. It's not a new request from the Indigenous community, but something that has been met, just like a lot of requests from the Indigenous community have been met, with a lot of defensiveness and opposition...the settler colonial state can't even properly take accountability for the past, which has led to where we are now.” (Interview with MA) Interviewees recognised that truth-telling is not just about the past; several interviewees made a connection between past and present, with one interviewee commenting that an important aspect of truth telling was so that “the contemporary circumstances are understood better” (Interview with CT), and another stating “this is not a historical situation. It's an ongoing situation.” (Interview with JN)

Both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interviewees highlighted the importance of honesty in truth-telling. A male Aboriginal interviewee described the personal empowerment which comes from truth telling, “because at the end of the day, if you can just go to bed knowing that you've done everything you can for yourself and your family and you've told the truth all day, that's a very good outcome for you.” (Interview with GM) For a female non-Indigenous interviewee, the meaning of truth-telling “is being honest and not hiding away from things because they hard to deal with. As somebody who values honesty, I think it's really important...But just from a literal what does truth telling mean, it's honesty and I think honesty is the foundation of good relationships.” (Interview with MR)

Some non-Indigenous interviewees found it difficult to pin down what the term ‘truth-telling’ meant. This is not surprising as our media analysis research indicated that the term is used very widely and applied to a range of diverse contexts. Two interviewees commented that they had initially had a fairly narrow understanding of truth-telling, which they had subsequently re-thought. For example, one male non-Indigenous interviewee commented “I thought it was mainly about getting the story correct about how people - how Aboriginal people were treated or - and in some ways, [are] still being treated.” (Interview with AG)

This interviewee further commented that “part of my initial idea of truth telling was that basically all citizens sort of basically get into a yarning circle, if you like, and discuss it.” (Interview with AG) However, through his involvement in this research project and further reading he had realized that “it's got to be an ongoing thing” and that “there's actually a lot more to it than that now. It's - you know, things like acknowledging Country, acknowledging Elders, flying the Aboriginal flag - that sort of stuff... it's much more encompassing.” (Interview with AG) A female non-Indigenous interviewee indicated that she had initially seen truth-telling as more of an event than an ongoing process; “I do suppose I tend to think of [truth-telling] as events that bring, in this context, Indigenous people together to relay their experiences and histories, whether it's a combination of personal experience and broader history, historical context.” (Interview with CT)

Non-Indigenous interviewees saw a clear link between truth-telling and history. One female interviewee described truth-telling as “being much more open with telling a fuller picture than what possibly has been the conventional stories, histories, interpretations... there has been some intentional not necessarily mistelling of the truth, but absence of some key facts or fuller picture.” (Interview with JN) A male non-Indigenous interviewee commented that “Truth-telling is about reflecting on history, how we got into the predicament we're in, and about deep listening and about accepting that changes need to be made.” (Interview with EW) This interviewee described his role preparing policy briefings as “a form of truth-telling, because it's just putting basic factual information out there.” (Interview with EW) For another interviewee, truth-telling was about “revealing Aboriginal perspectives of history and understanding what experiences Aboriginal people have had in Australia, ... usually there's a dominant voice in history. In Australia, that's tended to be a white male perspective, and it's kind of re-examining history to make sure that we have the voices and experiences of more minority people.” (Interview with BB) Sharing personal histories was seen as a key aspect of truth-telling for another non-Indigenous interviewee, although they emphasised that shared history doesn't necessarily mean consensus; “I envisage people sitting around in a group and just talking about their own personal history. Maybe other histories as they see them from their point of view... A shared history doesn't mean that they're both agreeable to each other.” (Interview with TM) Speaking about the transformational impact of inviting Elders into her school community to present to students, this interviewee also commented “I know for students at our school that have no idea about the histories in our particular area, and once they've heard that information, it's a bit of a game changer.” (Interview with TM).

Highlighting the importance of diversity of perspectives within truth-telling, one non-Indigenous interviewee commented that “it comes back to that idea of it not being cookie cutter, and there are lots of different lived experiences, and probably lots of agendas and lots of different reasons Indigenous people have themselves for this.” (Interview with JN)

What kind of truth-telling activities had interviewees participated in?

As highlighted above, Aboriginal interviewees very much saw truth-telling as part of their day-to-day lives rather than as one-off events. One Aboriginal interviewee also discussed his ongoing truth-telling work with local schools and youth (Interview with GM). Some non-Indigenous interviewees had also engaged in 'truth-telling' in their personal lives, which they did by challenging misinformation about Aboriginal people. One commented "I've taken people to task a couple of times as well, in private conversations, and family members occasionally"; this had resulted in conversations which were "difficult but had to be had in my view." (Interview with EW) Another non-Indigenous interviewee said "I also think there sometimes just has to be calling out. I know in social situations I have heard people at a dinner or something say something and I'm just saying 'no, I'm sorry. I don't agree with you. There are some facts here' or 'I'm sorry I don't agree with you.'" (Interview with JN)

Non-Indigenous interviewees identified the following range of truth-telling activities and events that they had personally participated in:

- Cultural competence training involving Elders undertaken at work;
- Political rallies;
- Co-management committees seeing input and advice from Aboriginal people on issues relating to care for Country (Interview with AG);
- Presentations by Stolen Generations survivors;
- Organising and participating in school-based truth-telling;
- Truth-telling through their professional roles and responsibilities, or within professional associations (Interview with EW);
- Acknowledgement of Country, paying respect to Elders or flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were described by one interviewee as a form of truth-telling (Interview with AG).

One non-Indigenous interviewee also highlighted other important forms of truth, for example the right of reply to child removal records and in-person apologies for members of the Stolen Generations provided by Aboriginal Affairs NSW (Interview with BB).

Why is truth-telling important?

Responding to a question about why truth-telling was important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, an Aboriginal interviewee highlighted truth-telling as a two-way process - "I'm not going to pour my heart out and tell you everything I know if you're not going to be at least truthful with me." (Interview with GM) Another Aboriginal interviewee spoke about the importance of truth-telling in providing a voice to the oppressed, but also highlighted the need for respect, integrity and humility in truth-telling; "I think it's because we've been oppressed. I think it's because our voices have been subdued... I don't come in as an expert or a person who has more knowledge. I come in as I'm here to learn, what is it that I'm not getting, and I always use those words: can you - for me to better understand can you guide me? ... what is it that guides me? I think it's human rights and humility based on integrity." (Interview with ST)

The literature review identified the importance of a pedagogy of discomfort for learning across cultural difference, and this was also highlighted by an Aboriginal interviewee, who commented that "in truth telling you've got to be in the point of discomfort I think in order to understand. So if we're coming in and saying 'I know better,' and all of that, how can we be at a precipice of understanding? ... we need to have humility and understanding and openness and be in that discomfort to learn." (Interview with ST)

One non-Indigenous interviewee spoke about the importance of raising the general awareness of the Australian population about "what is happening" to First Nations peoples. This interviewee commented that while there should be "a certain level of regret" for the past, this wasn't necessarily the "main driver" of truth-telling: "I think it's more the fact that this is what has happened and this is the truth and this is the history that was still being written in the early to mid-20th century was still really glossing over what the reality was." (Interview with AG)

What can truth-telling achieve?

Interviewees were asked to comment on what they thought truth-telling could achieve.

Addressing his experience collecting testimonies for the *Bringing Them Home* inquiry, one Aboriginal interviewee spoke about the power of truth-telling; "I sat with these people, and they told me their story and I believe their story and I don't think it is anything but absolute truth. I can tell you, I've sat there for two hours opposite somebody and they've not said a word, they've been so upset. But at the end of the day, whatever they wanted to tell me and what they wanted me to scribe, I would do. For people to say - you know, people are starting to think about the *Bringing Them Home* report and the Uluru Statement from Heart as just being documents, it's not, it's a lot more. I don't - I'll stand up every day of my week for my people or for myself, but I won't engage in people that just aren't (1) very [inaudible] or (2)

are not educated enough to or care enough to actually do something about it.” (Interview with GM) Aligning with these views, another non-Indigenous interviewee emphasised the importance of truth telling leading to change, and not necessarily as an end in itself: “The Indigenous community is sick of asking and talking without hearing. There needs to be something coming the other way, which then leads to an agreement. Then progress and change... It's not a panacea, but it's an important part of the next step in reconciliation, I think. You'd hope that with more opportunities for truth to be told, that, easily, would lead to some more change, but there needs to be significant energy into what comes as a result of understanding, rather than just sitting back, ‘Oh, well, the truth has been told. And we can stop now.’” (Interview with MA)

For some interviewees, it was important that truth-telling lead to changing attitudes. One non-Indigenous interviewee commented that “to me, the desired outcome is that attitudes change, probably particularly more on the non-Indigenous side than the Indigenous side ... I think even in my local community still there's great division.” (Interview with AG) Another non-Indigenous interviewee commented on the need for people to “shift their thinking.” (Interview with JN) This interviewee also hoped that truth-telling would create greater empathy towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, “to get people to realise that they, even if they're strugglers and battlers themselves, they actually have grown up with greater privilege than some other people who have, you know, are living with the legacies of these things... I think we all just need a bit more kindness and understanding in all our worlds.” (Interview with JN)

One non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted the important role that truth-telling could play in improving relationships and resolving problems at a local community level – “Take that time to listen to the local Aboriginal people and take that time to develop a long-term relationship. Stop thinking about these things in short term agendas. That way you can work a way out of some of the problems that confront you.” (Interview with EW)

For a number of non-Indigenous interviewees, the impact of truth-telling was drawn from the power of personal experience; one interviewee commented “testimony is huge, and having stories heard and the nature of people's experiences, and really having an understanding of how that impacted people.” (Interview with BB) Another highlighted the impact of Indigenous people speaking from their personal experience and sharing personal anecdotes, which enables the listener to personally connect; “I think that makes it real for people. It's not - I mean you can even put a quote in a text book but ... you can't empathise with that as much as if there's a person sitting in front of you. I think without that empathy then it's difficult to put the story in the history in with your own.” (Interview with TM) One non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted that “It's seeing firsthand the impact that certain situations have had on people and the sort of flow on effects ... also personalising these stories so they're not just statistics ... it's also the emotion that comes up, those sorts of things that are so powerful ... even if it's not necessarily a matter of changing your mind completely about the issue, even if you are sort of already on board, so to speak. Hearing that personal testimony, it has the power to then change how engaged you can be and also, I suppose, it helps you in conversations with other people as well ... just feeling better

equipped to discuss it with people and being able to relay it in human terms rather than just dry historical fact.” (Interview with CT)

For one non-Indigenous interviewee, truth-telling had the potential give people a more thorough understanding of the “breadth, I guess, of things that have happened to Aboriginal people in Australia and the length of time that went on and the impacts that that has had for people. Feeling that people really get that, I think, is very powerful.” (Interview with BB) This interviewee also commented on the power of non-Indigenous recognition and acknowledgement; “seeing and hearing from people that they are genuinely sorry that this is what they have experienced is very powerful.” (Interview with BB)

Responding to a question about the limits of truth-telling, one non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted that “you can’t change the past...it’s not going to change structural racism, it’s not going to change power imbalances in systems, it’s not going to change things like that, but it potentially can draw links in people’s understanding and minds about the things that happened and why they have led to the circumstances of today.” (Interview with MR)

One Aboriginal interviewee addressed the issue of differing expectations about what truth-telling might achieve between First Nations and non-Indigenous participants: “I think with truth telling acknowledgment is a big part, in saying ‘I got it wrong.’ ... this is where the Western justice and law comes into play, when for Aboriginal mob it's not about that. It's about that deeper healing, which is acknowledgment that, yeah, you did do wrong. You did do that.” (Interview with ST) In analysing responses to the survey, we identified that non-Indigenous respondents were generally more optimistic about the potential impact of truth-telling than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents, and this sense of optimism about the benefits of truth-telling was also reflected in some of the interviews. One non-Indigenous interviewee hoped that truth-telling could lead to equality and provide “opportunity for Indigenous people to do - to live their lives as they want to do it without, I guess, so many of our European laws and regulations that currently prevent it”; he also hoped that truth-telling would contribute to “peaceful coexistence” between First Nations and non-Indigenous peoples, although he also expressed the concern “I don’t know if it’ll happen in my lifetime.” (Interview with AG) Another non-Indigenous interviewee expressed the hope that truth-telling could “lead to more positive outcomes, lead to more understanding, more education, more engagement, and more engagement... not just the non-Indigenous community listening, but Indigenous people being listened to, would improve how they view that whole relationship.” (Interview with MA)

What makes truth-telling authentic?

Interviewees were asked what factors needed to be present for them to see a truth-telling activity as legitimate or authentic. One Aboriginal interviewee spoke about looking for genuine engagement; “If I think that it is a genuine authentic attempt to have a conversation, I’ll participate.” (Interview with GM)

A number of non-Indigenous interviewees highlighted the need for truth-telling to be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with one interviewee commenting that it need to be “driven by the Indigenous community, first and foremost” (Interview with MA), and another stating “Well, without a doubt it would have to have Aboriginal people being able to speak their experience and I think it should be led by Aboriginal people.” (Interview with BB) Another non-Indigenous interviewee identified the need for “an interchange between the correct Indigenous people - and when I say correct I would think that the people who are connected to that particular bit of Country - and probably non-Indigenous people who are sharing that country.” (Interview with AG)

In addition to being led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, non-Indigenous interviewees highlighted the need for truth-telling processes to be respectful of First Nations people, with one interviewee commenting “The agency of the Indigenous people coming to tell their stories would be paramount for me and that there are measures in place to ensure their safety and wellbeing in the process ... and making sure ... as much as you can - because you can never truly guarantee - the respectfulness of those who are coming in as non-Indigenous people to that space.” (Interview with CT) For another non-Indigenous interviewee, truth-telling “would need to be really driven by values like respect and have those things committed to by everyone in the room... I think it's about listening and respectful listening and acknowledging...I imagine it's not about like blaming or you can't change the past...it's about listening and hearing people's voices and stories and validating them, not about any sort of , I don't know, blaming or shaming, or going into trying to dissect why things happened necessarily, but it's about hearing and understanding the impact and consequences of the histories and the stories and the things that have happened.” (Interview with MR) This interviewee also highlighted the need for “respectfully disagreeing, if disagreeing is something that comes up.” (Interview with MR)

A non-Indigenous interviewee commented on the need for truth-telling protocols, not necessarily formal facilitation and mediation although “that could be called for in some contexts.” (Interview with CT) However, for another non-Indigenous interviewee, truth-telling worked best when it happened organically rather than being overly structured: “I don't think truth-telling should have a purpose or an aim or anything at the end, like okay have we hit this goal. Have we got a KPI here...in the spaces that I've been where this has happened and it's happened really well, there's been no aim. It's simply we're here and we're going to share.” (Interview with TM)

One non-Indigenous interviewee indicated that having evidence would strengthen the impact of truth-telling for some, although she emphasised that this did not necessarily have to be documentary evidence; “I think that's very important, to be shown some kind of evidence. I think that's what Bruce Pascoe did so cleverly in *Dark Emu*, by saying ‘hey, it's written here. It's written by one of you guys, and you’ve chosen not to listen to it or not to illuminate it.’ That’s one side of it and I think sadly that's what's necessary to most non-Indigenous people. Then the other side of it is the authenticity of the lived experience, and someone who may have no material evidence for something but has, yeah, has the sort of personal experience that they have, that they see is a product of this untold past or this misrepresented past. Then I think that's valid too.” (Interview with JN) Some interviewees also thought there would be benefit in some type of official acknowledgement of truth-telling. One non-Indigenous interviewee hoped there would be “some kind of reciprocal motion from a government, a body that is, at least symbolically, accepting this truth as true... It doesn't necessarily need to be an official body, but that obviously further legitimizes it.” (Interview with MA) Another non-Indigenous interviewee commented “Government needs to have that formal role of apologising, reparations and facilitating truth telling and listening to survivors about their needs and what is required on their healing journey. Government is still getting it very wrong in some ways.” (Interview with BB)

Where should truth-telling take place?

One Aboriginal interviewee spoke about the importance of truth-telling in his local community to raise awareness about First Nations peoples’ experiences, commenting “I want them, not to be saddened, but want them to reflect what Aboriginal people locally have been through.” (Interview with GM) For a non-Indigenous interviewee, the benefit of local truth-telling included “being respectful and hearing and understanding the history of the place that you have come to.” (Interview with BB) This interviewee spoke to the success of local community-based truth-telling activities; “local things have always been really important for - the Myall Creek memorial, and the Appin massacre memorial are two particularly local events that have had some carriage for many years and are really important to those communities. I think on a Stolen Generations front, the communities around Bomaderry and Kempsey and Cootamundra have their kind of links with the sites and things on Sorry Day.” (Interview with BB)

One interviewee who lived in a regional area highlighted practical issues such as access and transport to attend truth-telling, commenting “it's probably important to have it in lots of smaller towns and villages here. We don't have any public transport.” (Interview with TM) Another regionally based interviewee with young children spoke about her strong preference for local events, and for these to be inclusive of children, because “that’s a beautiful catalyst for me to have those conversations with them and to continue those conversations with them.” (Interview with MR) For this interviewee, local-level truth-telling would also be a form of community building and connection, because currently “There

aren't those opportunities to engage more deeply with the Country that I live on." (Interview with MR) The potential risk of local truth-telling resulting in "a lot of opposition from elements in the community that just don't want anything to do with that" was also mentioned by this interviewee (Interview with MR). When asked whether local truth-telling could cause local divisions and tensions, another non-Indigenous interviewee responded "Look, I think the tensions and the divisions are longstanding... certainly on a local basis I don't know if the level of truth telling is really very high. So I don't know if that's necessarily causing division and, if it is, I haven't witnessed it... But I think there's also still a great level of some - to some extent fear as well of change and how is it going to affect what I do now? Like for example, if I was a wheat farmer west of here on 20,000 acres of country am I going to lose some of that country? ... I think people are worried about losing possession instead of thinking about the fact that you may not lose it, you may share it ... But – yeah. I mean, the area I live in, that's still a long way from being an accepted idea." (Interview with AG) However, another non-Indigenous interviewee saw local truth-telling as a way to resolve community conflict. Speaking of his work advising councils about the impact of Native Title, he commented "The fundamental message that I was getting across at the local scale was that these issues are quite real. And at the local scale, you've got to live with each other. It's all very well for the state and the Commonwealth to head off to the Federal court and the High Court, but at the local scale, do you really want that animosity between you, when it's not really necessary? When I saw these people in the room together and invited them to tell their stories about how they got to be where they are, as I say, it was really quite transformational. Now that, in itself, was a form of truth telling, at a very local scale." (Interview with EW)

One non-Indigenous interviewee spoke about the need for the full spectrum of national, state and local truth-telling activities – "with existing communities on all sorts of different levels ... there should be avenues for these sorts of – for truth-telling on all of those levels if they're wanted and needed ... I'm reluctant to put them in any sort of hierarchy, because I really don't know. But I can imagine that small, local level would be incredibly effective and necessary." (Interview with CT) Another non-Indigenous interviewee commented "I think it has to be at every level. I think it has to be around the dinner table, it has to be in front of the TV when the kids are watching and in other words, very domestic spaces. I think it needs to be in schools as well." (Interview with JN)

Barriers to truth-telling

Interviewees were asked to identify what they thought might be the main barriers to participation in truth-telling, for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people. The section below begins by considering the barriers identified as primarily impacting on First Nations participation in truth-telling, and then moves on to discuss barriers impacting on both First Nations and non-Indigenous people, then those specifically impacting on non-Indigenous participation.

Questioning the truths shared

An Aboriginal interviewee expressed concern about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander truths will be received by non-Indigenous people: “In my experience, Aboriginal people own their truth very well... we say our truth. It's how that is received and judged again ... what is the purpose of truth telling and what are you doing? I've got to come back to that all the time. Does truth telling have its role? Yes, it does. Yes, it does, and it must. It's essential because of how Aboriginal history has been portrayed It's hard for an Aboriginal person when everybody is putting their perceptions and discourse onto us.” (Interview with ST)

Speaking about the specific barriers to truth-telling for First Nations people, a non-Indigenous interviewee commented “it can be really painful if there are naysayers in the room or people responding negatively to what's being said. That's insulting and painful as well and actually might make it worse. I don't think you ever going to get 100 per cent solidarity. I think there are barriers in - historical barriers, you know. 1938 there was a big campaign and it fizzled out, 1967 was meant to have a huge impact. Perhaps morally it did for a short time but then it sort of fizzled out. It's that kind of how long have we got to keep fighting for?” (Interview with JN)

Deficit thinking

Discussing the destructive impact of deficit thinking about Aboriginal people and the need for a strengths-based approach to truth-telling, one Aboriginal interviewee described herself as a rock: “I view myself like a rock. I can throw the pebble in, I can see a ripple but I don't know how far that ripple will go. That's all I can do, my best at any point in time.” (Interview with ST) The metaphor of truth ‘rippling’ out through communities was also brought up by a non-Indigenous interviewee, who spoke about the “ripple effects” from participating in truth-telling, in terms of recognising “the extent of the pain and damage” caused by policies or individual actions; this interviewee also highlighted positive learnings such as “people's unbelievable just resilience and courage and generosity and just fortitude ... the complexity of how those things sit together.” (Interview with CT)

What happens to your truth? Data sovereignty in truth-telling

One Aboriginal interviewee expressed concern about the potential for truth-telling to be an extractive process; “what are you going to do with the information I've given you?” (Interview with ST) This comment raises the need for truth-telling to clearly establish protocols around knowledge exchange and the subsequent use of the information shared. This interviewee later highlighted historical examples of Aboriginal peoples’ words being “taken out of context and being weaponized back”, drawing on the example of the *Little Children are Sacred* report being used to justify the Northern Territory Intervention. This highlights a risk in truth-telling: if the information shared gets taken out of context and people don't understand it, if participants engage in deficit thinking, if they don't understand the history of the trauma and disadvantage that First Nations people are living with, then some might blame Aboriginal people for their disadvantage.

Concern that truth-telling might lead to conflict between First Nations people

One Aboriginal interviewee raised the issue of lateral violence and the potential for conflict between Aboriginal people, commenting that the focus should be on “an opportunity for every Aboriginal person over a certain age to have an opinion. That's what they should be talking about, not their opinion or why they have that opinion.” (Interview with GM) A similar point was also raised by another Aboriginal interviewee, who commented “how can we enable our mob to - I call it - chew the fat, chew the fat respectfully.” (Interview with ST)

Two non-Indigenous interviewees also mentioned the potential for truth-telling processes to create conflict between First Nations groups, particularly where land or other vested interests might be at stake (Interviews with AG and EW).

Lack of trust

Two non-Indigenous interviewees raised the issue of lack of trust as a barrier to participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. One interviewee commented “I think the history of how it's been difficult for them to be listened to, or not listened to, let alone aggressively rejected. Yeah. I mean I would understand any Indigenous person who wouldn't trust - you set up a truth telling exercise, and you say us, the non-Indigenous community, is going to come in in good faith. For an Indigenous person not to trust that, I would understand completely ... Then on top of that, similarly for them, you might need to grapple with awful things that have happened to your ancestors.” (Interview with MA) Trust was also highlighted by another interviewee; “For Aboriginal people, I imagine that there would always be a level of distrust around government around how their information and stories would be handled, whether you are going to encounter respectful or disrespectful people, how is your safety going to be assured – those kinds of issues.” (Interview with BB)

Trauma

Trauma was identified as an issue that might impact on both First Nations and non-Indigenous participation in truth-telling. A non-Indigenous interviewee commented that “truth telling should not be a retraumatising experience as much as possible. Now it can be a healing thing for people to be telling their story, but for some people, if they're not in that space or time for that, it may not be a healing experience - it may be a retraumatising experience, and if you had a situation where it was other people - non-Indigenous people invited into the space, there is a danger of re-traumatisation in that respect.” (Interview with BB) This parallels an issue identified in the literature review, that truth-telling can be re-traumatising for some participants in some contexts. This interviewee highlighted that “The most basic thing that you can do for somebody who has experienced trauma is to listen to them and validate their experience, and in terms of the most basic level of what we can do as a nation, that’s that. You can then go upwards to things like reparations and to grapple with things like how do we address things like intergenerational trauma ... but the most basic level is acknowledgement - ‘yeah, it happened’ and ‘I hear you,’ and then apology, ‘I’m sorry.’ Not being able to do that is unbelievable.” (Interview with BB)

An Aboriginal interviewee highlighted the potentially traumatic impact of truth on the listener, commenting “How does the person receiving the truth deal with that?” (Interview with ST) One non-Indigenous interviewee commented that truth-telling was hard; when asked what made it hard, she identified the challenge of talking about traumatic events. This interviewee noted that people tended to avoid difficult and traumatic things in their own lives, as many people “struggle with dealing and talking with hard things of a traumatic nature.” (Interview with MR)

Concerns about cultural safety

When asked how she assessed how much truth she wanted to share in any given context, one Aboriginal interviewee commented “it's about a feel: how do I feel being in this situation and does the feel give me safety to speak? And I know that's very – that’s innate but I can also judge... body language is really important. I can see if you are being authentic or engaged, which means are you really wanting to hear what I have to say... I can feel the emotion or whatever in a room. So that guides me with my truth telling as well, and I think that's a good one. My aunties always told me that my gut - I should listen to my gut more often and your head then goes into battle. So I go with my gut as that third safety mechanism, for the want of a better word.” (Interview with ST)

When asked how truth-telling could be made culturally safe, one non-Indigenous interviewee who had worked with Stolen Generations survivors identified a range of important considerations, highlighting the need for “involving the local Aboriginal community and survivors and survivor groups into the planning of any event – so making

sure it's a setting that people would feel comfortable with. Are you providing support from counsellors and things, separate spaces where people can go into if they're needing to take time out and to talk to somebody? Making sure that you are incorporating culture into it – so it may be appropriate for smoking ceremonies and things like that to begin and end the day and having enough of the informal time and that sort of space for yarning, easing into it – those kinds of things, and the meals are critical because the meals are spaces where people informally talk.” (Interview with BB)

One non-Indigenous interviewee addressed the challenge of balancing issues of cultural safety with the need to address resistance; “when I say non-threatening, I don't mean non-confrontational ... it still has to be relatively safe. Safe, yeah, how do I say it? Culturally safe for everybody... but that doesn't mean you have to deny it either... You have to understand your role I suppose. If you are the school teacher standing in front of the class or if you are the principal that's about to sort of initiate something that gets said at assembly or something like that, I think you have to be conscious of who your audience is and the risks of alienation or digging heels in, you know, obstinacy.” (Interview with JN) For this interviewee, “people have to still feel quite safe I think to be receiving this information. Discomfort is fine, but if you're really, really hard hitting no-one is going to come to visit and so no-one's going to hear anything. It's an interesting conundrum.... because if you lose your audience... then there's nobody to tell and we're making zero impact then or you're attracting only an audience who doesn't want to know. I think that's counterproductive.” (Interview with JN)

Who can participate in truth-telling?

One non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted the need for clarity around when non-Indigenous participants were being invited to participate in the truth-telling process, and when it needed to be First Nations-only: “there'll be times when... the healing journey is one where survivors want to be in their own circle. So, it's an awareness of, I guess, and clarity around events where it's a wider audience, and where it is that truth telling sharing versus, I guess, a more intimate space where survivors might want to be on their own or be - for example, telling how they want to tell their stories. Because, I mean, that's a critical part - so much has been taken from survivors. I know that they feel very keenly about the ownership of their stories and control of their stories and making sure that we're respectful of that is a key part of it.” (Interview with BB) This interviewee also commented about people needing to feel “comfortable to walk into the space of that - and so feeling that there is a clear invitation... there are many people who still would not have Aboriginal people in their circle, immediate social circles and things like that and would be - would feel uncertain about putting themselves in that space.” (Interview with BB)

Identity can be complex

One Aboriginal interviewee discussed her awareness of extended family members in her local community who no longer identified as First Nations because their connection to

community had been lost. This highlights that truth-telling is complex because our shared history is complex; past actions are lived as an everyday reality by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and this can have deep impacts at a personal level. This had strong parallels to the comments made by an interviewee who identified as non-Indigenous; she was aware of her family's Aboriginal ancestry but no longer felt able to claim the connection. Speaking to her own complex family history and genealogy, she commented that that she had "Aboriginal ancestry a very long time back in my family that was hidden." (Interview with MR) She also had settler ancestry and her father was a migrant. Her mixed ancestry had created confusion about her role in truth-telling; "I don't know where I fit...how do you engage in that truth telling without being kind of ripped to pieces?" (Interview with MR)

Building truth-telling and truth-listening capacity

Not everyone is able to express their truth articulately; one Aboriginal interviewee commented that capacity building would be required to support the participation of some First Nations people in truth-telling: "There certainly are barriers. Again, some of our people ... probably will find it really intimidating to actually have that discussion." (Interview with GM)

Non-Indigenous interviewees also highlighted concerns about the capacity of some non-Indigenous people to participate appropriately in truth-telling. One interview highlighted lack of emotional intelligence as a barrier to some non-Indigenous people's participation, "not having the ability to like hold multiple perspectives and not having the capability or the capacity to do that." (Interview with MR) For another non-Indigenous interviewee, non-Indigenous listening skills would need to be developed, particularly "learning how to listen rather than tell." (Interview with JN)

Ignorance

Non-Indigenous ignorance was identified as a barrier to truth-telling by one Aboriginal interviewee, who commented "From a non-Aboriginal perspective, I think it's the ignorance. ... I think a lot of non-Aboriginal people feel that they are quite educated, but they're quite ignorant and they don't quite know how to - and I've seen it on so many examples. There's nothing wrong with asking the question 'how do I?,' and I think if the words are 'how do I?', and the answer is 'I will help you', I think the truth-telling process is part of it." (Interview with GM)

Fear

In a powerful metaphor describing truth-telling as akin to manoeuvring the Titanic, one Aboriginal interviewee highlighted the fear of "hitting icebergs" as a barrier to truth-telling,

but also spoke of the need to recognise that mistakes are part of the learning process. Her comment speaks to the need for resilience in truth-telling:

in Australia we are wanting to change the consciousness of a nation. So I put that in the context of the Titanic and it's a big ship and we don't want to hit icebergs ... so how can we manoeuvre something so big and be respectful at all stages but knowing we might hit the side of an iceberg. But that's okay because that's our learning for the next iceberg, but acknowledge that. (Interview with ST)

A non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted fear arising from a lack of understanding in the non-Indigenous community about what truth-telling might mean; “ordinary people don't know what that might entail and what that might mean, and people are scared of what that might mean - changes to their status quo, changes to the power structures, changes to their privilege, changes to –having to own up to something that had happened, and that might mean changes for them.” (Interview with MR)

Another non-Indigenous interviewee identified fear of loss as a barrier to non-Indigenous participation in truth-telling; “I think it's - often it's the fear of some loss ... Yeah, whether property or even - it's hard to describe - I was going to say loss of social standing. It's not that but it might be fear that other people might gain social standing.” (Interview with AG)

Guilt / shame

Guilt and shame were identified by a number of interviewees as potentially impacting on both First Nations and non-Indigenous participation in truth-telling.

Our survey findings indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents were more likely to indicate a concern about being made to feel ashamed or guilty as a barrier to participating in truth-telling than non-Indigenous respondents. One non-Indigenous interviewee raised this issue in relation to the participation of First Nations youth in truth-telling; “For our youth, I think there's that - especially our Indigenous youth, that shame of participating or hearing their own Elders, own aunties or uncles talk in that space.” (Interview with TM)

The issue of ‘white guilt’ was raised by one interviewee as a barrier to non-Indigenous participation; “I suppose there's also a lot of white guilt involved as well, and shame and being anxious about what you're going to hear and where that's going to - how that's going to land, what you do with it, that sort of thing.” (Interview with CT) Another non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted that for people with colonial ancestors, there might be resistance to acknowledging that their forebears might have been involved in dispossessing Aboriginal people, “especially people who are descendants of people who have been around for hundreds of years in this country. You could have your relative brought up as someone who committed something awful, something along those lines. People can be resistant to that... Guilt and shame, and changing the way that they view their family. Especially someone

who's been here for many generations. This is hypothetical. But you have a big family, people talk about grandparents and great-grandparents, and hold them in this lovely esteem of nostalgia, this is my family. But it would be hard to accept any other view than that kind of idea." (Interview with MA)

Disinterest / indifference

Several non-Indigenous interviewees highlighted lack of interest in First Nations issues and truth-telling as a major barrier to non-Indigenous participation. This was articulated in a range of ways, with one interviewee highlighting the privilege of choice: "the white people walk by this and go, 'I choose not to participate or choose to participate.'" (Interview with MR)

One non-Indigenous interviewee commented that for the non-Indigenous community, "the busyness of life" got in the way of participation in truth-telling; "people are just so caught up in the day-to-day rat race that making space and time for truth-telling is challenging. People really being aware of the level of importance of this to our country and the time from people that is needed to put into this for healing to occur is a big issue." (Interview with BB)

For another non-Indigenous interviewee, it was important from a strategy perspective to recognise and accept that not everyone will be highly engaged, although it was also important to call-out misinformation when you heard it; "I'm always very conscious that you shouldn't have to be wearing this sort of campaign, if you like, plastered across your forehead. Not everybody has to be a warrior for it and some people would rather just get on with their lives ... I think there's a risk there of some people just switching off. I think you can also get probably truth-telling fatigue, like any sort of initiative or campaign, so if it's heard everywhere. I mean I've given just Acknowledgments to Country ... it's a balancing act and we have to work out and navigate that pathway a little bit carefully." (Interview with JN)

Lack of knowledge / awareness about how to participate

Lack of understanding in the broader community of what truth-telling is and the lack of awareness about how to participate were identified by a few non-Indigenous interviewees as major barriers to non-Indigenous participation in truth-telling.

One non-Indigenous interviewee who had not personally participated in truth-telling commented that a barrier for him had been "lack of awareness of a specific truth telling exercise. Most of my working life hasn't had heaps to do with the Indigenous community, so it's not something that has presented itself to me. I would happily, at the very least, engage heavily, let alone actively, but it's not something that I've come across. But then again, it's not something I've really sought out, either." (Interview with MA) Another non-Indigenous interviewee commented that she hadn't participate in any truth-telling and that she "wouldn't really know where to start... ..one of the barriers would be like, just not knowing when and how." (Interview with MR) This interviewee also identified geography (she did not

live in an urban area) and had two small children, so felt that her capacity to participate was limited; for her the specific barriers to participation were “time, capacity, not really knowing.” (Interview with MR)

One non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted lack of understanding of what truth-telling entails as a barrier to participation by non-Indigenous people, creating the need to educate people about what happens during truth-telling processes; “so we put up a post that says come to this truth-telling. I don't know what that is, I'm not going... What are they going to make me do?... I think maybe just that unknown. That would be the biggest barrier here in our area. What is this, what am I signing up for? ... I think just knowing that it is for everyone - you maybe don't even have to offer anything when you're in that space, just being in that space is what we need you to do for now ... There may not be anything in it for you, but there could be, but you won't know until you go. I think that - probably those two things, the ‘what's in it for me’ and the ‘I don't know what I'm doing there, what is that.’” (Interview with TM)

These comments highlight that community-based truth-telling initiatives will need to include public education about what truth-telling encompasses, as well as practical information about where and when truth-telling will be taking place.

Uncertainty about how to be an effective ally

One non-Indigenous interviewee articulated her sense of powerlessness and uncertainty about how to contribute; “I don't know enough about things...it can be hard to engage with and especially as a white person, like seeing the Voice, the stuff playing out with the Voice, there's no - there's nothing you can do, I don't feel like there's anything I can do to legitimately help or be involved or support that in any way other than go and vote. My own conflict avoiding. ... I'm not political, I'm not going to get involved in political campaigning, but it's hard to watch people fight over this stuff... there is nuanced stuff but like I don't understand all the nuance.” (Interview with MR) Another non-Indigenous interviewee also made some points about being an effective ally and not “helping” Aboriginal people; “you also hear some people say ‘Oh, but I just want to help’ and the Aboriginal people say ‘we actually don't want your help. You've been helping us for 200 years and it hasn't worked ... I think that possibly is something that I grapple with actively but I think other people might just find it paralysing or go in so brazen that they are helping and then alienate the Aboriginal people or turn up where they're not wanted.” (Interview with JN) This interviewee also identified concern about performative activism as a potential barrier; “I'm very conscious of that idea of swanning in on my great white horse and the idea of a white wokeness and being woke and all that kind of thing and thinking ‘aren't I a good person?’ In other words, am I doing it for me and show that I'm concerned about these things and that sort of thing? In other words, the last thing I want to do is come across as being patronising and thinking that it's to make me look like a better person ... but I also think if we don't do anything, if we don't play any part, if we don't play any part in it, then it's just sweeping it under the carpet still and leaving it up to others.” (Interview with JN)

Political factors

A few non-Indigenous interviewees identified politics as a barrier to participation in truth-telling, with one commenting “some of it is probably just a matter of political beliefs, conviction, whatever you want to call it.” (Interview with CT) For another non-Indigenous interviewee, the politicisation of issues such as truth-telling might be a turnoff for some; “sometimes people - when things do take on a very organised shape then if you're not as perhaps militant or outgoing or forthright in your thinking, then having people who are can be intimidating sometimes. You think, 'oh, I don't want to be one of them, I just want to have my own quiet opinion and I'll do it my way thanks.' I don't think everyone wants to wear a badge and wave a flag, but that doesn't necessarily mean they don't want to participate or contribute or that they don't support it.” (Interview with JN) Another non-Indigenous interviewee spoke about her avoidance of Aboriginal issues because of the “fraught” nature of First Nations politics, despite her long-term commitment to social justice issues; “I never wanted to engage in the Australian Aboriginal space, like reconciliation space or working with Closing the Gap as it was like 20 years ago or whatever, because I thought that was too fraught, and I didn't know how. It was easier to go offshore, and, you know, take that interest in social justice and development overseas.” (Interview with MR)

Lack of understanding of structural disadvantage

For some non-Indigenous interviewees, a lack of understanding of systemic or structural disadvantage was seen as a barrier. One interviewee commented “I still don't think probably the majority of Australians really have a grip on the kind of concept of the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the effects that that has and things like – just almost like the basics of economics - like of, for example, of dispossession. Like if you haven't had land or property ownership in your family, or you've only had it for one generation – all that sort of thing – the cumulative effects of passing down of economic wealth, that your family's potentially missing, and those sorts of things. I guess we still need a better understanding, collectively, of those kinds of things.” (Interview with BB)

'You can't change the past'

One non-Indigenous interviewee commented that the view that the past is past might be a barrier to participation in truth-telling, commenting “there is often, I think, still a sense of 'that was in the past' – that it's done – that sort of thing, and I don't think people are widely aware ... how long these policies went for and that we still have survivors and things with us.” (Interview with BB)

Lack of evidence to support oral testimonies

A non-Indigenous interviewee commented that “non-Indigenous people expect there to be evidence and so they're distrustful of oral histories”, which she described as feeding the belief that “if it wasn't written down or it wasn't recorded, then it didn't happen.” (Interview with JN) Consequently, this interviewee saw the benefit of evidence to support truth claims, even though she felt that lack of this should not prevent someone speaking their truth; “some kind of evidence, or ... some kind of provable fact. Fact is such a bad word ...as a historian I use oral histories a lot but we all know that oral histories can - you know, they're very subjective and often based on memory which can be either incomplete or has manifested in some way differently for one person to another, but it's still legitimate. At least to be heard. Even if you decide, mm, not so sure about that bit, it shouldn't prevent it being told.” (Interview with JN)

Enablers of truth-telling

Interviewees were also asked to identify what factors they thought might enable participation in truth-telling.

The importance of respect and keeping an open mind

For an Aboriginal interviewee, mutual respect was a key enabler of truth-telling. He also highlighted the need for people to be willing “to listen and learn from each other”, because “nobody has – I certainly don't have - all the answers.” (Interview with GM) For one non-Indigenous interviewee, the power of personal relationships and being open to learning were seen as enablers of participation; “it's just human connection, learning about each other and taking the time to learn about each other that overcomes those prejudices. And you can come from totally different worlds and get past that just by being in contact with each other, being respectful and open to learning. Maybe not everyone has the capacity to do that, but like that connection and talking and listening and learning is so important for overcoming chasms and building relationships.” (Interview with MR) Another non-Indigenous interviewee also emphasised the importance of having “an open mind. I do get the feeling that most people would at least not aggressively reject the idea to begin with. How they would react to what the truths are would depend on them or what the truths are, obviously. But I think even staunch conservatives can recognise that Indigenous people have been treated horribly in the past, and there's stuff that needs to be spoken about and changed, and this is an avenue for that.” (Interview with MA)

Being clear about what truth-telling entails

When asked what would get people to participate in truth-telling, one non-Indigenous interviewee responded “I guess, understanding of the process, for a start. I mean, if I went to - if I went down the street now and I invited half a dozen people on the street to say will you come to a truth telling with me most would go ‘What's that? ... what is it? What's in it for me?’” (Interview with AG) Another non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted the need for clear information to be provided about the truth-telling event, in terms of who should attend, what would take place, clear expectations around behaviour, managing disrespectful conduct, protocols around the ownership of any cultural and historical knowledge shared, and “feeling that that is going to be a safe space where you're going to enter.” (Interview with BB) This interviewee commented that if you are expecting people to attend truth-telling, there also needs to be clarity around “what's the end product, what's the outcome, what's the purpose?” (Interview with BB)

Engaging participants

The importance of emphasising positives and not positioning truth-telling as only about negatives was highlighted by a non-Indigenous interviewee: “my engagement with

Indigenous community comes off a lot of positive experience. There's a lot more negative than positive in terms of history and truth telling, but trying to push positive truths to people, and create awareness of that, I think could be an effective tool in trying to address the way that a lot of people seem to reject history and truth telling." (Interview with MA)

The challenge of appropriately marketing truth-telling was highlighted by another non-Indigenous interviewee, who recognised that truth-telling was a more "complex, nuanced thing, that there's positives to it as well as just the awful heartbreaking stories that you anticipate going in." (Interview with CT) This interviewee argued that while truth-telling should not be promoted as a "feel good event", stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience and survival might also be shared, so it wasn't necessarily going to be all "awful heartbreaking stories." (Interview with CT) This sentiment was echoed by another non-Indigenous interviewee, who identified having "a bit of a party, a bit of a celebration of culture, maybe that can exist alongside truth-telling about the hard elements of the history" as something that might attract people to attend (Interview with MR). Strategies such as "holding events in locations and at times that suit a range of people" (Interview with CT) and the importance of timeliness and cultural safety were mentioned – "Sometimes you just have to ... be in the safe space or the right place, the time and place to take it on board." (Interview with JN)

Another non-Indigenous interviewee suggested integrating truth-telling with other community activities; "having truth-telling spaces attached to other events, so it's more of – 'oh we'll just pop in here', there's not so much pressure without - I think though what the risk could be there is that it takes away from that gravitas of that space and what that space might look like if there's a transient people coming in and out of that space when they see fit. But it might get people to be in that space for a few minutes and then when they see it advertised next week, they might go 'I've seen what that was like and I could do that for an hour' Just get rid of that - you know that anxiety about something new for some people." (Interview with TM)

Contribution to healing and social cohesion

The hope that truth-telling might contribute to healing for First Nations people was seen as an enabler of participation by one non-Indigenous interviewee; "if this truth telling can do a healing for Indigenous people, and non-Indigenous people that's a definite benefit." (Interview with AG) This interviewee also saw truth-telling as something that could benefit the community by improving social cohesion; "It's something that could clear a conscience about history. I think also I guess one of the other reasons you would want to do it is that you could see a benefit to the community. You can see a benefit to Indigenous people. You can see a benefit to non-Indigenous people. It's a better cohesion of two cultures." (Interview with AG)

The power of local truth-telling

One non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted the impact that local Aboriginal-led truth-telling about the specific history of her local area would have in the rural town she lived in;

“I think having some of our Indigenous community talk about events in [town] in the last 60, 70 years that a lot of our local men and women who are not Indigenous were here for, and to hear how two different sets of people can experience that event really differently would be really powerful here.” (Interview with TM)

What is the role of non-Indigenous people in truth-telling?

For one Aboriginal interviewee, truth-telling involved a commitment from non-Indigenous participants to work for a better future; “I think that what they need to do is not worry about what’s printed in the paper or the media, or get too involved in the word sorry and things like that, but just take a moment to reflect that although they may not have been around when it happened, it did happen, and it happened on our doorstep and for whatever reasons it happened, it did happen. But in truth-telling, I say to them we are all charged with responsibility for this to never happen again.” (Interview with GM)

Non-Indigenous interviewees also identified important roles for non-Indigenous people in truth-telling processes. One non-Indigenous interviewee saw a role for non-Indigenous participants as witnesses and as contributors to developing new understandings, reflected in the following comment; “I think whilst truth-telling will have most benefit for our Aboriginal community, I think that there needs to be - not the balance but I think there needs to be the people of European descent there to see where the waters have been muddied and to try to clear that up together... I don't think in that space that it's an equal amount of voice time but I do think that that needs to be built in.” (Interview with TM) For another non-Indigenous interviewee, acknowledgement and recognition were key contributions that non-Indigenous people could make to truth-telling; “it is this acknowledgment of the fact that we exist in a land that has been occupied for a very, very long time ... and also we need to recognize that in the early part of colonisation people didn't recognise that. People didn't recognise that there was a civilisation here because probably it was a civilisation that was just so different from theirs ... recognising what's happening, acknowledging what's happened but also acknowledging that in the present we are still living on lands that Aboriginal people still have a connection to.” (Interview with AG)

A number of non-Indigenous interviewees spoke about listening as a key role for non-Indigenous people in truth-telling. One interviewee commented that the role of non-Indigenous people was “just listening, and accepting difficult truths, which there’ll be a lot of. Then, of course, telling their own truths. I mean, yeah, I think the main thing is accepting what's happened, and the accounts of the Indigenous community, especially when it comes to the cultural genocide and all of the really difficult things. But yeah, just taking in on board and accepting that... you need to recognise that's what happened in the past, and learn from mistakes or issues, and try to move in a better direction as a result.” (Interview with MA) Another interviewee commented “I think we need to listen. There is no truth telling without

being heard” (Interview with BB), while for one interviewee the role of non-Indigenous people was “as listeners but also as participants so that I guess the disagreements can be heard in a place where it's safe to do that.” (Interview with TM) One interviewee defined his understanding of deep listening, “to listen to a comment and to have the ability and the courage to learn from it and to reflect on it.” (Interview with EW) For another, listening was linked with being open to learn; “It's critical because I think that personal being in the room and hearing somebody tell their story is profoundly impactful ... in a way that history lessons and seeing things on the news and that sort of thing aren't necessarily. So, I think that it is going to be a huge part if we are to move forward, I think this is one of the ways in which we can make it happen. In terms of non-Indigenous people, I don't know how that works really on a practical level in terms of, for want of a better word, recruiting people into that process or sort of encouraging people into that process. As a non-Indigenous person, I see my role in that context would be to come with an open mind and trusting in the process ... Being very clear that it is our role to listen, not necessarily try to solve or contribute unless that's asked for, but we're there to listen and act on information that is given to us.” (Interview with CT)

A non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted that while non-Indigenous people could choose their role in truth-telling, it was important to be involved whatever this might be; “you have to decide what your role can be in it. Even if it's only a small one, that's better than doing nothing at all.” (Interview with JN)

The relationship between truth-telling and healing

When asked about the relationship between truth-telling and healing, one Aboriginal interviewee responded that while truth-telling could contribute to healing, “I think you're healing is your own journey and I think your healing can only be done when you're in a position to heal yourself... it has to be a process of wanting to be healed and actually wanting to talk about the trauma.” (Interview with GM) The interviewee went on to comment that trauma “just doesn't go away the next day because you talked about it. It's a lifelong burden that you carry, and it's just how you deal with it on day-to-day basis which is the issue” (Interview with GM). As we have identified in the literature review, these comments highlight that truth-telling doesn't automatically lead to healing for all participants; organisers of truth-telling events need to be realistic about this and ensure appropriate support is provided for participants who may be impacted by trauma.

Truth-telling and education

A number of interviewees commented on the relationship between truth-telling and education. Commenting on non-Indigenous ignorance as a barrier to truth-telling, one Aboriginal interviewee highlighted the failure of the education system to teach people about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; “A lot of people get very intimidated by not having the knowledge... it goes back to learning in the schools ... a lot of people haven't actually had the opportunity to listen and learn about Aboriginal culture.” (Interview with GM) A non-Indigenous interviewee who taught First Nations content at university commented that “I still get students turning up in my classrooms at [institution] who have come with that kind of educational background, very limited background about Aboriginal history... I have to spend the first couple of weeks of my classes, making sure that my students are on a level playing field, with respect to understanding history from an Aboriginal perspective.” (Interview with EW) Another non-Indigenous interviewee who worked in secondary education addressed the issue of teacher reluctance to engage with First Nations content, speaking about “teachers that want to teach it but are scared to teach in case they get it wrong... I don't know how to answer that or fix that, but that is what I find at our school and in our area, ‘what if I get it wrong? I'm just not going to do it at all.’” (Interview with TM)

Because of ongoing gaps in incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in the curriculum, the onus seems to still be very much on individuals to educate themselves, reflected in this comment by a non-Indigenous interviewee; “I guess the thing is you become really aware and that it's just something you, as an individual you need to reach out and gain some of that knowledge. I - like I said, I've read a lot about frontier wars and massacres and not – not that I revel in that sort of reading...but why don't people know? Is it apathy again too? Like ‘I don't need to know. I don't need to know and I haven't bothered researching it’ because a lot of it you – you virtually do have to research it. You have to go and find those books. They're not best sellers. They're not the sort of thing that people know about.” (Interview with AG)

One non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted the need for public education resources so that people could build their knowledge and understanding in the way that suited their personal preference; “perhaps that is part of the community truth telling, is where can I find out the stories? Perhaps you can download videos or ... having a reading list, have a watch list, podcast list for people who do want to know more but receive it in their own preferred way.” (Interview with JN)

Truth-telling in the workplace

One key finding from the interviews is that the workplace is clearly an important site of learning and engagement with truth-telling and Aboriginal history.

One non-Indigenous interviewee spoke of significant changes in his workplace around engagement with Aboriginal community representatives, and growing recognition that Aboriginal people should play the lead role in advising how to care for Country because of their deep connection; “I basically say ‘I don't have the knowledge you have so you share with me what it is that needs to be done and as a manager I will try and get this achieved according to your sensitivities and your culture.’” (Interview with AG) Another non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted truth-telling activities as a regular feature of her workplace; “the institution I work with has a First Nation speaker series so I go to as many as them as I can - and look, not all of them are necessarily about truth telling but it's very rare that that doesn't come up. The institution I work for as well is also, you know, has an active First Nation's strategy which includes being committed to truth telling. I guess I'm exposed to it professionally as well as personally.” (Interview with JN)

It is important to acknowledge that not all workplaces may be open to truth-telling; one non-Indigenous interviewee had experienced active resistance to his attempts to promote truth-telling within his professional body (Interview with EW). However, as highlighted by another interviewee, workplaces could provide a venue where people who would otherwise not going to a community-based event can be exposed to and participate in truth-telling (Interview with TM).

Who should be involved in truth-telling?

A non-Indigenous interviewee who had migrated to Australia as a child, the only non-Australian born interviewee, commented that it was important for everyone to be involved in truth-telling; “I think that everybody should be involved because even as migrants we come in and we're still sharing the benefit of what Australia is today and – well, to be blunt about it it's – you know, I admit I'm enjoying benefits of Australian - current Australian society at the expense of Indigenous people's previous history, and maybe even current conditions ... So I really think – no, I think it should be a universal thing. I think that if you're going to be part of Australia you need to be part of this process.” (Interview with AG)

Another non-Indigenous interviewee expressed their feeling that they were not necessarily the target audience for a truth-telling event. For this interviewee, lack of positional power to implement any outcomes from the truth-telling made them question the value of their participation; “I feel like I would be a little unsure about attending just on that level...it's sort of been interesting unpacking that in my own head, kind of going ‘Oh, it should be other people, not me’ - but then, why not me?” (Interview with CT) While this interviewee was clearly attempting to critically reflect on and work through what her appropriate role in

truth-telling processes was, the perception that she struggles with that someone 'in authority' should be responsible or take action parallels an issue flagged in the literature review by De Costa & Clark, who describe a sense of 'delegated authority' being prevalent among non-Indigenous people - the feeling that someone other than themselves has the responsibility to act (De Costa & Clark 2016, p. 200).

One non-Indigenous interviewee raised the concern that truth-telling might be 'preaching to the choir', as the people who were likely to attend were those who were already onside in terms of supporting First Nations issues; "People that are going to sign up to come to truth-telling are the ones that want to hear it anyway, the ones that have already heard it that are engaged in that already." (Interview with TM)

Truth-telling processes

A number of interviewees made comments about how they envisaged truth-telling processes might operate in practice. For an Aboriginal interviewee, it was important that truth-telling involved a two-way exchange: "With my truth telling how much agency am I giving, how much imposing my knowledge on to them am I doing? So that is very important to me because if I'm having a conversation I want the power to be equal and I don't want to impose my thoughts onto them. I want us to have a considered approach to when we're talking." (Interview with ST) This interviewee also highlighted the need for truth-telling to utilise a human rights framework; "I think if we come in with a human rights framework that can guide us." (Interview with ST)

A non-Indigenous interviewee commented that to engage a wide audience, truth-telling needed to be more than sharing personal stories; "If it's just people story telling then they just become stories ... not everybody responds to that. They just say 'well I've got a story too, why can't mine be heard? I didn't have an easy life, or my mum was abused as a child' or whatever it is. We always have stories of hardship or injustice in some shape or form so I don't think it can be only that... I think it has to be quite a mix of - and a lot of - different things. It can't just be a 'poor me' story." (Interview with JN) This comment highlights a potential difference in knowledge transmission methods between First Nations and non-Indigenous people, but also the need for truth-telling information to be transmitted in a variety of ways.

When asked whether her school-based truth-telling has protocols in place for students, one non-Indigenous interviewee commented that the Elders who ran the sessions were expert in creating an environment in which people behaved respectfully. Commenting on her experience working with the Uncles from Kinchela Boys Home, this interviewee commented that they would probably be happy to be challenged on what they said, to say "let's talk about it then", although she was conscious that not all First Nations participants in truth-telling would welcome being challenged or would have the confidence to deal with this

(Interview with TM). Acknowledging the potential for conflict or disagreement in truth-telling, this interviewee flagged the need for some facilitation; “I don't want to say there needs to be a mediator because you're sort of pre-empting that there'll be a disagreement and I think sometimes when you pre-empt that you've set it up to fail. I think there needs to be - say if there's truth - there needs to be some sort of connector, not a mediator as such but someone that knows both groups well. But then that's making it sound like there has to be two groups and it's not - that's not really the only part of truth-telling.” (Interview with TM) This interviewee also suggested that a similar approach to that taken by the program ‘You Can’t Ask That’ might be valuable in truth-telling, or the use of an anonymous but moderated question box, to allow people to ask questions without feeling exposed: “[my students] love that idea that I can get this answer that I've been longing for but I cannot ask it. There might be... a bit of that within the truth-telling ... [so that] people don't have to feel identified in their ignorance.” (Interview with TM)

While several non-Indigenous people spoke of their desire for truth-telling to happen organically, one acknowledged that “there still has to be a level of organisation to achieve that. Like, who sits in the yarning circle? Who – and who organises the time, the place, the - all this sort of thing. It's not going to happen spontaneously.” (Interview with AG)

2. Findings relating to historical acceptance

Why is there a persistent lack of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories in Australia?

Interviewees were asked to comment on why they thought there was a persistent lack of understanding and acceptance of Aboriginal history in Australia.

One Aboriginal interviewee spoke about guilt and fear as barriers to historical acceptance; “guilt could be one. One could be, why do we have to go - that's in the past, that's history.... why are we talking about that now, when that happened years ago? How has that affected me?’ ... Are people scared of compensation? I think it's fear...Or is it the unknown?” (Interview with ST) These comments were echoed by a non-Indigenous interviewee, who also highlighted “an aspect of fear and possibly also guilt.” (Interview with CT)

One non-Indigenous interviewee highlighted population demographics, commenting that Aboriginal people were “very much in the minority compared to the main population” (Interview with AG). “Unconscious bias” was identified by another non-Indigenous interviewee as a barrier to historical understanding; she further commented “Why is it so hard to accept these things? They don't want to be held responsible, feel guilty, feel like their ancestors, their people did these horrible things or were capable of those horrible things, they'd rather think of them as like beautiful souls that walked the Earth before them.” (Interview with MR)

Another non-Indigenous interviewee commented on the impact of racism and longstanding ideas about cultural superiority; “some of it just comes from that engrained idea of the supremacy of European settlers. ... I think I've come to realise in the last few years just how deeply engrained a lot of that - how engrained racist attitudes still are.” (Interview with CT)

Several non-Indigenous interviewees raised a range of issues relating to inadequate history education. One interviewee commented that gaps in history education particularly impacted on people aged over 35 years, but also on migrants; “I think partly it is education and there are a lot of people who say ‘well why didn't I learn that at school? I learnt about Captain Cook, I learnt about the First Fleet, I learnt about Federation, but I didn't learn about any of this other stuff.’ ... if you're talking about white Australians, a lot of settler colonial Australians that have been here for decades and decades and decades, all their heritage let's say, Anglo Celtic heritage, then they probably haven't heard it. Then there's also a huge proportion of Australians that come here later in life and they've come here to create a new

life and they've got their own cultural heritage and cultural history to maintain and honour and celebrate.” (Interview with JN) For another non-Indigenous interviewee, the lack of learning this content in school perpetuates doubt and denial and means that people are lacking the basic building blocks of knowledge that further learning can be scaffolded onto; “I think sometimes when they hear it as an adult...it's the first time they've heard it... How do I go to school here and not know that happened?... I suppose if I wasn't in that frame of mind of being really open and accepting of all that, then to go ‘well I'm hearing this for the first time at 19, it can't be true.’ ... maybe watching it, *The Australian Wars* on telly and then going ‘well - I haven't heard this before, they're just making this up now.’ ... because you haven't heard it when you were young to build those blocks on top of it.” (Interview with TM)

Another non-Indigenous interviewee spoke about lack of knowledge and understanding as a barrier; while there are lots of sources of information, people didn't necessarily know where to find information, and they lacked the basic understanding of how colonisation worked to dispossess Aboriginal people in Australia; “there are multiple things that we need to do to improve the level of education of our community about our history. We haven't done that well. If we are to embark on the third element of the Uluru Statement, then I think we have to embark on a public education program about the truth of our Aboriginal history... at the end of the day, the truth telling is about public education and changing hearts and minds.” (Interview with EW) These comments parallel those of another non-Indigenous interviewee, who also highlighted the lack of knowledge about how to access quality information; “If it's not plainly obvious to you and out there then how are you going to know about it? You can't all go to a library and read every book ... In other words, where are you getting your information from and how *do* we get the information out there? ... there is obviously a want to know about these things but how do you access it if you're not the type that's going to be going to museums and cultural, you know, academic seminars and stuff like that.” (Interview with JN) These comments suggest that truth-telling could usefully be accompanied by public education resources such as reading lists, websites and other reliable sources of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history.

A non-Indigenous interviewee spoke about the ongoing impact of the politicisation of Australian history during the so-called ‘history wars’; “There is still such a politicisation of history in Australia. In the ‘90s, particularly, and early 2000s, the whole black armband history and that sort of sense of – the government really perpetuated an idea that history was being manipulated for particular agendas, and it's really hard, I guess, in any sort of smear campaign to recover from that. When you create doubt in the public's mind that these kinds of things are happening, then there are – seeds of that will always exist. I guess we had an apology, but that was quite a long time ago now and now we have a current political situation which is very divisive again. It's like now because of the upcoming referendum we have the yes or the no debate and we're heavily politicising it. It's almost like when you have those kinds of environments, that facts can't even be sort of neutral. I wonder whether there's any sort of possibility of a bipartisan agreement on the essential truths of Australian history.” (Interview with BB)

A non-Indigenous interviewee who was the only person interviewed under the age of 30 highlighted his own positive experiences of learning about Aboriginal issues at school, although he attributed his knowledge about Aboriginal issues primarily to the personal relationships he had developed through his family and through his involvement in sport; “I grew up at a school that had ... a decent [sized] Indigenous community, and my father taught Indigenous community management at university. So I'm quite privileged with my awareness of the Indigenous community growing up. It took some reckoning to kind of realise that that's not what everyone had access to. But I think that's a good example of what can be achieved with the right education from an early age.” (Interview with MA) This interviewee also raised the important issue of some family’s undermining the validity of information taught to children at school; “it goes down to how people are first hearing about this history...The flipside of that is you incorporate it into the curriculum really well, and then you've got people going home and their families are saying, ‘No, that's wrong’ ... at the start of the process of people's lives when they're hearing about this, it's important to have truths being taught there as well.” (Interview with MA)

What factors had led the interviewees to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories?

Non-Indigenous interviewees were asked to share their thoughts about what factors had led them personally to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories.

Although we have earlier highlighted criticisms by interviewees about the limitations of current educational approaches, several interviewees spoke about the personal impact of positive educational experiences on their own historical understanding. A “pivotal bit” for one non-Indigenous interviewee was studying Aboriginal Studies at university – “I took a unit in my last year, and that, for me, was the one that was really like - opened my mind to the extent of the history. I had never heard of the massacres before and that sort of thing. That’s where I learned about that and the importance of language and things like that.” (Interview with CT) This interviewee also spoke about being exposed to small amounts of Aboriginal history in high school, and the impact of the reconciliation movement in the 1990s. Another interviewee spoke about her love of history and being influenced by “an idea of layers and the unseen and different voices” - “there's a whole lot of stuff around the concept of layers of history and of seeing things differently. Personally, I guess I trace my journey to where I am now – I had two very influential teachers – so one at high school and one at university – and they were good in helping their students to see the unseen, I guess.” (Interview with BB) This interviewee spoke of her realisation that “there's more to things than what you see and the way that you see it,” and she also highlighted “the power of place and standing on somewhere where significant things have happened and trying to put

yourself in somebody's shoes and feeling those emotions.” (Interview with BB) One interviewee, herself a teacher, identified the impact of “my own teachers, that would not shy away from some of the stuff ... that interest and the wanting to know more probably from those little scratching of the surfaces at school.” (Interview with TM) For another non-Indigenous interviewee, a significant factor was attending a faith-based school, where there was “a culture of giving and helping others, so there was that kind of take on Aboriginal Australia built into the way that history was told even in the nineties... I remember having Aboriginal people come to the school and talk as part of assemblies and things like that and maybe that was an element of truth telling. Like it wasn't necessarily about all the hard stuff, but it was about inclusion, and equity and social justice, and inclusion was built into the culture of the school.” (Interview with MR)

Several interviewees spoke about the impact of personal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. One interviewee highlighted that his interpersonal interactions with First Nations people had shifted his historical understanding (Interview with EW). For another, a key factor was “having friends and family that are Indigenous... Knowing people and being able to ask questions casually without getting your head bitten off because you don't know something. Not everyone has that - the privilege of having friends and family or playing sport with people where you feel comfortable enough. I don't know how you force that.” (Interview with TM) An interviewee spoke of his realisation that not everyone had enjoyed his experience of deep engagement with First Nations people throughout his childhood; “I grew up with a lot of Indigenous kids. My dad ... knows a lot of Indigenous academics and high level Indigenous people. He's been very involved with that community for a long time. So I kind of grew up with a lot of their kids, and their friends' kids. So I think initially, that seemed normal. There wasn't any othering, because I was quite lucky with having that around me growing up. But then, maybe getting more awareness, because I was very into AFL, and looking at the history that the Indigenous community's contributed to the AFL. I was very, very sport obsessed for a long time, and that was another level of engagement there. I've just had heaps to do with that community, and you can't really have heaps to do with that community without hearing about the truth, or some truths at least, of what they go through, and what can be done about it. Yeah. I mean, to take that on and to have awareness of the history, and the challenges they face, and to not at least take some level of passion in wanting that to change, then...yeah.” (Interview with MA) It is also interesting to note here that two non-Indigenous interviewees (MA and TM) specifically identified sport as an important place where non-Indigenous people interacted with and got to know First Nations people on a personal level.

For two non-Indigenous interviewees, witnessing racism was identified as a factor in their development of historical understanding. One commented, “it started with the very blatant racism that I witnessed when I was a child when we first moved here because I didn't understand it. Like it – like perhaps it was prevalent in Netherlands too - I don't know - but I never witnessed it there and so I thought it was very unusual.” (Interview with AG) Another interviewee spoke about racism within her own multicultural family; “I was brought up across two different cultures, and saw firsthand that racism in my own, just saw racism in my

own family and saw prejudice and intolerance across those two families.” (Interview with MR)

Finally, two interviewees mentioned the impact of engaging with First Nations-authored histories and texts, with one specifically mentioning Bruce Pascoe’s *Dark Emu*; “the veracity of it’s been questioned, but I think that was just the point. He’s saying we have to look at our history through different eyes ... in those colonial diaries you don’t read about them even when they’re talking about those people and those places. So, it was not rubbed out, but it certainly wasn’t mentioned, so our history is very closely edited.” (Interview with JN)