

Commons Conversations – Amelia Telford & Grace Vegesana

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Grace Vegesana

Hey, Millie! I'm very excited to have the opportunity to dive into some of these questions with you. But Hi, I'm Grace. I am a 23 year old woman of color from South East India and Botswana and I basically just really care about community. I particularly care about my communities who are from Western Sydney, which is the most culturally and linguistically and religiously diverse region on the continent, and I really care about building the power of young people from communities who are being impacted by climate change to be able to actually respond and put forward solutions that we need to intersecting crises.

And for you, Millie, who are you in your own words?

Amelia Telford

Thanks, Grace, I'm really looking forward to this interview, and I feel like it's exciting that you and I get to do it together. I feel like we can explain what that connection is to each other at some point. I am Amelia Telford, but most people know me as Millie. I am a Bundjalung and South Sea Islander woman and so home for me, where my country is and where I grew up, is northern New South Wales, one of the most beautiful places in the world. It's where the rainforest meets the ocean, and the salt water is just such a special place for us. But I am living down on Wurundjeri Country in Melbourne, where I've been for almost about 10 years now.

I have spent most of my adult life, since finishing high school, working in the climate justice space, building up young people. I've recently gone through a big transition to move into a new role where I'm broadly working on First Nations justice and advocacy, and supporting First Nations leadership, in a new role at Australian Progress.

But in terms of life, who else I am... I'm also a stepmom (or a mom, I didn't really like the framing of stepmom). My partner, who is from Melbourne, had two beautiful daughters before we met and their names are Nary and Kaya. I've just been reflecting recently on how much raising them has empowered me to really think about how much we are trying to fight for their future. I don't know if it's realistic or not, but hopefully we can create a world where they don't have to fight as much as we do.

Grace Vegesana

That's really beautiful. I love that you can reflect on yourself both in a professional capacity, but also who you are outside of that, and what that makes you. Let's wind it back a little bit. What drew or threw you into this work, working around climate change, working around first nations, justice. What were the catalysts that made you step into this work

Amelia Telford

Yeah, I've reflected on this, and I think that for a lot of us who work in community organizing and campaigning we often have our personal narratives of, you know, the

moment that we stepped in. There's quite a few moments for me over the years but really when I break it down I think it actually all starts from my childhood, and who my parents are. My Dad as a black man being with my Mum, who is a white woman, you know. Really, I think a lot of the injustices that my brothers and I experienced growing up and the stories we heard about the way that our parents were treated even by their own families. It exposed us to the injustice, the racism, and discrimination that people face in the world. Mom and Dad had to fight pretty hard just to be together and to bring us kids into the world. So I think there was so much resilience and strength and hardship that we heard about.

That then led to our parents instilling really strong values in us around how everything that we do and every decision we make has an impact on the world and our community around us, and instilled values of looking after one another, and looking after Country. Even little things like when we'd go to the beach or into the bush, and Dad would always say, Leave only footsteps, or actually if you can, leave a place better than you found it. I think that sort of stuff just really rubbed off on us.

Even in primary school, I remember getting pretty fired up about standing up for what I felt was right. An example of that is it didn't make sense to me hearing the Australian anthem being Advance Australia Fair, and in grade 3 I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, who was John Howard at the time, asking him to change the national anthem. At the time I felt that the song that would better suit this country was We Are One. I don't know if I would agree with that to this day, but at the time to me that song felt much more fitting to us, as a nation that was made up of people who've been here for tens of thousands of years and people who've come here more recently. So I wrote to John Howard and he wrote back, saying thanks for your letter, but unfortunately 9 out of 10 Australians still believe that Advance Australia Fair is the most fitting national anthem. I was like well, when I look around my house, and my community, and my school, actually I don't know where you get that statistic from because lots of people I talk to don't agree with that. So then I started a petition! Anyways, I guess what that draws out to me is just that fight, or the fire in my belly, that existed from a really young age. I think that's the case for a lot of First Nations young people and communities because we're born into a world that doesn't always love us and doesn't always treat us with the same respect and value our lives in the same way that it values others. And so we're inherently... We have this responsibility that not only exists from a cultural responsibility to look after our land and look after each other, but we're surrounded by injustice and discrimination. So whether it's influenced by our family and those who are fighting for our rights, or just being amongst that, and having experienced it, and then having to fight for change. It was just, I guess, in some ways inevitable to end up here.

In terms of learning more about climate change, it was learning about climate change at high school, witnessing severe coastal erosion on the east coast at home, and and really starting to connect the dots between what it means to be a First Nations person and have a responsibility to look after Country and the fact that our our land and our future was being taken away from us, and we aren't the ones making those decisions. We're the ones that have done the least to cause the problem and yet we're facing the most severe consequences and that just did not sit right. Over the years I started getting more and more involved.

Grace Vegesana

I think it's really beautiful to hear your story in your own words, and where it actually comes from for you as well. I really wanted to reflect on two things that you said: one was your dad's value of leaving a place better than you found it, and also feeling the impacts both within yourself and your community of climate change but knowing there wasn't the decision making and the structural ability to actually create change. I think that's a really clear part of your legacy, and I assume the work that you're going to be doing going forward, actually shaping and forging better futures within organizations within the progressive movement and creating those better places. Entering spaces and leaving them way better than you found them.

So I wanted to reflect a little bit on your journey of starting out really young in the climate movement, finding a place, and how you feel, like did you feel like it was the right place? And what made you realize it needed to change and needed it to be a place that you left better than you found it?

Amelia Telford

Hmm! That's really beautiful. I'd never made that connection. Because when I think about Dad's words, I always think about physically being out on Country. But I think you're right. Yeah, I am really proud of the impact that myself and a whole bunch of others have had on making particularly the climate movement, but more broadly progressive movements, more aware of the communities most impacted who need to be at the centre of everything we're doing and playing leadership roles in this work.

Grace Vegesana

So yeah, a part of your legacy has been entering into places that maybe weren't the right place when you found them, but realizing that something needed to change and that they needed to be left in a place that was better than when you found it. What was sort of that journey for you entering into a space that maybe wasn't fit for purpose yet?

Amelia Telford

Well, I think the first thing I'd point out is that this is such a common story amongst so many First Nations people having to trail blaze a pathway. Whether it's the first Indigenous doctors or the first Indigenous lawyers... So often, we have mob who exist in places where they don't have many First Nations peers around them. I think just acknowledging that is important.

For me, getting involved in the climate movement, I think from the very first event I went to which was Power Shift in 2011 hosted by AYCC. I was in grade 11 at the time and it was pretty evident even in the lead up to it. For example I got a call from the AYCC team at the time, asking me to give a plenary speech, and I got asked to do it on behalf of Indigenous youth. I said, 'Well, I'd love to accept the place to speak, but I can't do it on behalf of Indigenous youth, I'll do it on behalf of myself and my family, because actually there's a breadth of our people, a huge diversity of our people right across the nation. I can't speak for everyone, but I can speak for myself.'

I think that in itself really says a lot. There weren't many other mob who'd been involved before, and I think, just like having 'an Indigenous perspective on climate' just shows how

there was such a lack of understanding of the inherent role that Indigenous people play in looking after our land as we've done so for generations, and how important our leadership is in terms of the knowledge that we have of our Country and what it takes to look after Country but also our place in building the solutions that are actually going to work, and doing so with justice at the centre of that, and centring our rights, and the fact that if we were empowered to be making decisions about what happens to our Country, then we wouldn't have ended up in this mess in the first place

At the time I was a bright eyed, bushy tailed (whatever that phrase is), naive young person in a lot of ways. I think it wasn't until I met other people like Larissa Baldwin who actually went to go to Power Shift 2011, walked in the door, looked around, said to herself 'This is too white!' and she left. So it wasn't actually until I contacted Riss to come to Power Shift 2013 that she got involved in the client movement. And you know, there's a story that goes on from there.

But yeah, I think I just had so much optimism and energy, and I think that's important. But there were moments over the years that followed where I sort of had these like wake up calls, or I was like, 'Oh, shit!' We're actually up against these really entrenched systems of capitalism and patriarchy and white supremacy and colonialism. That this is gonna be a big journey and it's gonna take a lot of work, a lot of people and the way to do that is to then build up people and build up more young mob and build up our leadership and build up a network of support for one another, to be able to trailblaze that path together, because I think there's no one person that's gonna change all of this and we need to do it together and have each other's back through it.

There's so many lessons that we had along the way in terms of finding the balance between trying to make other spaces better for us versus just creating our own spaces that we need for ourselves. And how do we build up allies who we can trust who can do that sort of allyship solidarity building work not necessarily on our behalf, but doing so in a way that takes the burden off us because we could just spend our whole lives every single day trying to make everyone else better but it takes away from the energy and time that we can be investing in ourselves and in our own community.

It's a lot! But there's actually so many mob in so many different sectors and organizations and spaces that have gone through a similar journey to what we have in the climate space.

Grace Vegesana

Yeah, I think that's definitely an interesting balance between the need to build own spaces and actually forge the environments and the communities that are needed to thrive within their own right versus finding that balance of building up people around you to also be doing that work outside of those spaces too, with broader communities.

I remember at the Water is Life gathering in Canberra, in Parliament House there was the concept of concentric circles where basically the sit-in kind of happened where mob and elders were in the centre, and were able to speak. And there was like rows of allies in concentric circles around them, so that if police were to start removing people they would take the people who are least vulnerable or most comfortable with police contact and that

would both buy time but also protect the people in the centre. Can you unpack this a little bit?

Amelia Telford

It's funny to reflect on that moment, because I actually wasn't able to be in Parliament House inside, in that sit-in, because I'd been banned from Parliament House for a previous sit-in a few months earlier. So that was a hard moment for me, I was with the outside group outside the doors and everyone else was inside. We were together, and communicating, and it was super powerful but I didn't get to quite experience that exact moment. But that's how we planned it, to have First Nations people in the centre and then have, non-Indigenous allies surrounding us exactly as you say. So that we were able to hold the space as we needed to, and all the speakers and everything, and people's voices were being heard from the middle, and we expected that as people started to get removed that you would get removed from the outside first.

I think what actually ended up happening was that we held space for as long as we could and then everyone at a certain point decided it was time to leave together and everyone stood up together and walked out together, which I think is also beautiful. We'd done the work to liaise with the security and police to try to give us as much time to hold that space.

But I think in reality the thing to note is that as much as we try and create safe spaces at this point in time that's never a guarantee, and police are not safe like for our communities, and continue to kill our people.

And so yeah, how we do this work in a way that protects ourselves but also holds them accountable and pushes them to actually create the change that we need... I don't know that there's a perfect answer for.

What I think is most challenging, just to sort of reflect on how in my time while I was leading and working within Seed, and you got involved in AYCC, I think at the time where you got involved... this is from my memory, it might be different from your memory, Grace, but the AYCC and Seed relationship was really strong, and we had really strong allies within AYCC who we'd invested a lot in over the years. Where we'd worked so closely together. Those people had skills and expertise that they were investing in us. But then we were investing in them too, to be able to work with our mob in a way that was culturally appropriate and everything.

But then what happened? I think this is not only the nature of just youth organizing where people come and go, but what happened was when some of those people who had spent years of working with us where we'd given them feedback in moments where they fucked up, or we've been through a lot together, when some of those people moved on, and we had newer people stepping up who hadn't had that deep work together. It meant that in order for us to keep working in that way it required First Nations people to give so much in order to build people, to trust people to then go and hold those spaces for us.

And actually there was a moment where I was like: I don't know that that's actually realistic, and if that's okay for that to be something that we're willing to give, cause actually it's asking a lot of emotional labor and time and energy and resources that we actually, just

didn't really have. So it was at that point, and a variety of other reasons, that I was like, maybe you know, the nature of how Seed and AYCC works together actually needs to be different because I don't know that we can continue to work so deeply integrated in the way that we had when so many key leaders or key allies had moved on.

So this is the part that I've talked to other mob in other spaces about as well. Like, how do we build allies? But also do what we need to for ourselves when actually it takes a lot to build really deadly allies who we can trust.

Grace Vegesana

That's great reflections. Obviously, it's one of those cans of worms that will never really be answered, and is very much a journey that you've been on for many years and I'm sure you will continue to be on for many years too. Great to hear your reflections at this current point in time. Kind of looking back, but also looking forward.

On that note, I wanted to ask you which campaigns and community initiatives excite and inspire you. That can be anything that you've seen outside of Seed or inside.

Amelia Telford

Yeah, I think that we have had so many incredibly powerful campaigns that have been led by our mob over a really long period of time, really ever since colonization effectively.

When they're led by people who bring community along with them, I think that's when they're the most powerful. Over the last few years, I feel like there have been some big shifts in this country. One of the things I think is really beautiful is that Seed actually launched formally in 2014, which was actually the same year that the Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance launched and there's this moment that like some of us often love to reflect back on where a bunch of the Seed leaders and a bunch of the WAR leaders were together at the G20, protesting the G20. There was, you know, mining companies who were coming in and trying to influence governments and policy and all of that, and we did a whole heap of actions together.

It was just this time where it was oh, really raggedy you know. I think that if AYCC had known a bunch of what we were doing they'd have been like 'no, shut it down, it's too risky!', and like dangerous or whatever. But it was the time where we were just working out who we are and what we do and how we do it, and inspired by so much like grassroots activism that our families had been involved in, and all these people that we looked up to who were leading huge campaigns and activism. I think the power of young people and that creativity and energy in that moment is amazing.

When I look at where we've gone since then, I think for Seed, the huge shift that we saw in centering our people in the climate debate, and conversations where we shifted the way we talked about climate change to be through the frame of talking about protecting country. Because what I think is so important to name is that when you talk about climate change, or at least a few years ago when you're talking about climate change, people automatically think of scientists as the experts and people who aren't First Nations people as the experts. But when we talk about country and protecting country - automatically, we are the experts,

we are the experts of our own country, and it's centres First Nations people, it puts First Nations people in the driver's seat.

I think that shift was so important for us, to be able to talk with our own communities in a way that our communities understood these issues and brought our communities along with us, and then educated and mobilized and organized non-Indigenous people to be able to understand that as well. I think that we've seen such a huge shift over the years where there are so many community led initiatives now across the nation, where blackfellas are leading either campaigns to stop destructive projects on their country, or to build solutions, or to advocate for funding for a range of programs, or whatever it might be. That shift that we've seen with more and more voices of First Nations people on climate in so many ways is amazing and I'm super proud of it. Even with the bushfires, for example, at the end of 2019 and start of 2020, the conversation around the need for not just Indigenous land management, but actually land rights, and Indigenous decision making over what happens on our country. That response that we saw just stood out to us so much in a way where we wouldn't have if those fires happened 10 years ago. I really think that there's so much work that we did that contributed towards a lot more leadership of our people - there's a long way to go but I think that's massive.

And then in a similar breath, going back to Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance, the huge work that young people in communities did over the years particularly when you look at the conversations around January 26, Invasion Day, and the call for abolishing Australia Day and abolishing the date, and not just basically being about changing the date to another day where you can celebrate colonialism and white supremacy, but actually this is a call to really actually acknowledge the true history of this country.

And the need for our people to speak our truth and be heard and have our rights, not just acknowledged, because you know the Australian government has signed on to the UN rights of indigenous people, but it's not ratified, they're not legally accountable to actually following it, which means that they break it all the time.

I think there's just so much that those young mob throughout WAR, time and time again have put themselves really out there. I know even tomorrow Meriki Onus and Crystal McKinnon and a bunch, of others are in court, again, over putting on the Black Lives Matter rallies that they led in 2020 during the pandemic - when George Floyd died in the US, and when mob over here were outraged, not just in solidarity with black African American people in the US. The same way that George Floyd died, saying 'I can't breathe', so did David Dungay Jr in Sydney die at the hands of police. Centring the fact that this is happening here too, and it's different. It's a whole other yarn in terms of black people in the US and black lives in the US are African American people but similarly Native American people and Indigenous people in the US are also being killed.

What's happened in terms of the huge movement that has been galvanized here in this nation, particularly since 2020, with the Black Lives Matter movement, with the fires, with all these massive moments amongst the pandemic and the way that our community stood up. Even our response to Covid, the leadership of Aboriginal communities, to protect our communities from this scary virus, I think that has been so inspiring. There's so many

examples of when our people are leading we get the best outcomes, not just for us, but for everyone.

Grace Vegesana

I feel like the things that I took from that particularly was the need for leadership as being led by the people who are most effective actually benefits both them and everyone else and really drags all of our society up to a better place. I think there's lots of pieces in there about solidarity and working together and building a sense of community, not on organisational lines, but on shared community values and fights and movement lines instead.

I want to also ask you: of the many projects and campaigns that you've been involved in over the past 10 years, what are you most proud of?

Amelia Telford

Hmm, I think that the work that we did at Seed, and it continues to this day, in working with communities particularly across the Northern Territory, in the fight against gas fracking and the fight to protect country and water and our future and our culture is really incredible. Even before Seed started working with communities in the NT they were already standing up and fighting the gas fracking industry. Back in 2015 we first connected with young people in Borroloola, and then we started to then connect with communities across the whole of the Northern Territory. The reality is that at the time the climate movement was so focused on coal in particular, and stopping new coal mines, but also expansion of coal mines, there just wasn't much focus on gas at all. A huge shout out to Larissa Baldwin, who I think absolutely led the work across the nation in terms of saying how problematic the gas industry is. From both the perspective of obviously the impact that it has on water, and country, and climate but also more recently in terms of the Covid Coordination Committee being stacked with gas executives, and the gas industry being absolutely in bed with government.

The corruption that we've seen there and the need for communities who are already worried about this and standing up and fighting it to actually be centered in the fights, because I think arguably, the climate movement's work on stopping coal hasn't always centred coal communities, right? I think you could argue that in some places the work to try and stop gas hasn't always centred communities either. But it has been, and will continue to be, such a big, important part of the campaign to stop fracking - working with and bringing communities along on the journey with us. There's some incredible community leaders right across the NT who I really miss, I don't get to work with them as much as I used to, who are not just fighting gas fracking, they're fighting for their rights, they're fighting for housing, they're fighting for better roads, they're fighting for education, for funding for their communities. The gas industry gets sold as that would be the key to unlock that future which is absolute bullshit!

Just being able to relentlessly stand up and fight and know that so far the fact that the Northern territory isn't a shale gas field is the win. It is a huge win for communities, because they've held off these companies and held off government for so long. There's quotes from some of the gas companies saying, it's not because of money or economics,

or whatever, it's actually the lack of social license that we can't actually do what we need to on the ground.

I think that is hugely inspiring. It's a lot of work, and it's not easy work. But yes, if there's one thing that I'm proud of, and it's definitely not just me, it's a massive collective effort, it's the campaign to stop fracking in the NT.

Grace Vegesana

Love to hear it in your own words. I think that's really beautiful.

What are the impacts or ripples you've seen come from this work on fracking in the NT?

Amelia Telford

I guess this was one of the first big campaigns that Seed really led ourselves. Like prior to that we were working in solidarity on the campaign to Stop Adani. We always were coming from the perspective of how do we support the Wangan and Jagalingou Family Council, how do we support other traditional owner groups from the mine site, to the railway, right out to the port.

But for us taking on the campaign in the NT - Lock the Gate had done a whole lot of groundwork, but there just wasn't the work happening at a national scale, and also in a way that was telling the stories from the voices of people on the ground. I really think that when you look at centring our people and our communities in the story about what the problem is, in terms of the fossil fuel industry not only forcing these destructive, dangerous, risky projects onto communities, but telling that bigger narrative as well. The fact that this is not just happening in the NT, this is a tactic that mining companies with governments have used over and over again across this nation and right around the world to get access to land and to displace First Nations communities in order to just line their own pockets and absolutely exploit communities.

There's a bigger story there that I think in building the narrative, and the campaign, around communities fighting fracking in the NT, because we centered those voices and those stories, I think it really helped the rest of the country understand that whatever the projects are, but starting with gas fracking the NT, it is Aboriginal land, and it is Aboriginal communities. When communities have access to all of the information about what these projects would mean for them, more often than not communities want to stand up and fight back and actually call for alternatives that don't force them to exploit their land and each other. I think externally that story, being centered in all of the work not only helped build large scale awareness around the country about this issue, but also then contributed to big wins that we were able to see. Like even last year, as we were trying to call for no public funding to go to funding fracking in the Northern Territory we had a whole bunch of Traditional Owners, we did this in partnership with the GetUp First Nations justice team, traveled to Canberra, and met with Senators and Members of Parliament, and we were able to get a Senate Inquiry into public funding for fracking the NT. Whilst the outcome was that Labor did end up still supporting the Morrison Government's proposal, for however many billion dollars, or whatever it was for fracking, we did have this opportunity to really shine a light on the corruption and the huge huge risks and concerns that communities have about this issue. So just constantly centring those community voices has gone a

really long way in people understanding why that's important and then also has contributed to the lack of social license that is holding companies back. And also holding the government accountable and calling out their corruption as well.

Grace Vegesana

Yeah as an aside, I think the work being done in the NT and WA has deeply transformed the way we also think about those states and those communities. I think for a really long time the climate movement has really treated those areas that are so densely populated with Aboriginal communities who definitely don't have the same quality of life as potentially a lot of east coast communities and the resourcing that comes from like the east coast economy, and has very much sacrificed those communities, knowing that "they couldn't work on everything". But I think the work being done in the NT and WA is like deeply transforming the narrative, and has left such a huge legacy for how we think about gas fracking, but also extraction and colonisation and what that looks like in a very tangible way. So huge, huge, impact, very exciting to see both like wins coming out of Origin Energy, even though they're dogs and actually sold out to someone else anyways, but I think there's really tangible wins that we're able to see coming out of that. It's translatable to the everyday person beyond just the community work that you're doing to transform those communities and their leadership capacity, that they're handing down through generations too, it's really exciting work.

For yourself when you look back on the last 10 years, do you see any key milestones that really shaped you as a person, that you learnt from, or grew from?

Amelia Telford

Yeah, absolutely. I think in the early days, like when we were really trying to just fight to have a voice as Aboriginal people like in the climate movement - something that really gave me hope and inspiration and sort of support was building connections with First Nations people internationally, like the Pacific Climate Warriors, the Indigenous Environmental Network, and Indigenous Climate Action Canada, and seeing the way that they would be doing this work in their own communities, in their countries across the world, was huge. I know that when we then got to the point where we were able to bring out a whole bunch of people like Kandi Mossett (she goes by Kandi White now), Eriel Deranger, the huge legacy that Koreti Tiimalu left... I always feel so sad thinking about Koreti, given that she's passed away now. But the huge work that all the Pacific Climate Warriors have done, and having each other to be able to call on and support.

When we brought those people out to Australia to some of the big events that we did with our mob I actually think that hearing their stories and the stories of the impact that climate change and the fossil fuel industry was having on their communities; but also the way they were leading, and the way they were fighting back is what inspired so many young people in Seed and across communities. Particularly Kandi talking about oil fracking in her homelands in North Dakota, being able to bring her and Eriel talking about the tarsands in Canada, bringing them to the NT and meeting with communities in the NT was huge and so all of these had a big impact on me because it gave me the strength and support that I needed to continue on, and know that what we were doing there was a much bigger picture sort of vision and journey that we're working towards. Also just building so many relationships with so many mob across the country I feel so grateful to have had the

opportunity to connect with so many different people, doing incredible work across the nation and doing so in a way that I was learning from everyone just as much as they were learning from me.

I think there's different moments that sort of like hurt along the way. Where you know I talked before about being a bit naive and sort of optimistic, and there are a few moments where there were some key people who were like 'Oi, Millie' and sort of pulled me back and grounded me like and held me accountable. That actually is hugely important for anyone but yes, for young people leading in these spaces to have those people around you who have your back but also can hold you when you need to be given feedback as well.

More recently, knowing that there is a huge legacy that we've left, but actually it got to a point early this year that I realized I was putting so much of myself into this work that I wasn't really leaving much in the cup for myself and that wasn't going too well. I had to actually prioritize myself in order to keep going in this broader fight for justice for our people. Having that moment of realizing it was time to move on, to hand over the reins and to allow others to step up and take that on. To give myself permission to be able to have a break and walk away in order to put my time and energy into other things. It's been a journey, I've learnt a lot! There's been lots of tears, lots of laughter, lots of really really beautiful powerful moments. But yeah, it's... how do you love yourself and support yourself, and have those people around you that do the same? It's a challenge.

Grace Vegesana

Yeah, I love that and I also love that you ended on the note that a key moment was actually choosing yourself in this fight as well, and the longevity and the care that you need. I think the rest that you've taken across this year is also resistance in itself. Whether that's resistance against the capitalist grind or resistance against being really coupled with something that is both incredible but also really hard work, and is really emotionally draining and can't be carried by just one person in that form of leadership. I think it's really inspiring, to take big periods of rest, and acknowledge that. I really respect that from you, from being able to do that and take the time for yourself.

You talked a lot about looking back. You've had a lot of moments that define your leadership. That also comes into the way that you've had to strategise and work with communities in a really collaborative way of bringing both people in who are on the front lines of fights but also people who internationally are living those fights but have so much to offer to communities and to yourself. What has really defined this period for you and your sense of leadership?

Amelia Telford

In the really big picture, when you look at the vision of the world that we're trying to create... I've been doing a bunch of visioning recently in the context of there's an upcoming referendum in this country, where First Nations voices and issues are gonna be at the centre of that debate. Really thinking about the opportunity we have to create some transformational change and transformational policy change, but actually paint a picture of what that vision is for the world that we're actually working towards and what are the steps along the way in terms of how to get there. Whilst you could zoom into a specific campaign

and look at what it's gonna take to win that exact campaign there's a broader strategy that you have to look at. How is everything we're doing actually working towards the vision of what we're actually trying to create together and what does that look like?

I don't think we spend enough time on imagining what that world looks like, because it's so hard to imagine anything different to what we've experienced now. So much energy goes into fighting the bad stuff, and not enough energy goes into building the good stuff which actually is what it's gonna take to get people to understand and visualise and actually believe that is possible, the vision that we're working towards is possible. I think that the values and principles that we have around how we lead in these moments is so important. Where we're open to being accountable to the communities that we serve, where we feel that deep sense of responsibility to be bringing everyone along with us and having the conversations that need to be had, and doing so with integrity. I'm really prioritizing building those relationships and connections. I think it's absolutely critical. You can have the most strategic campaign plan, or whatever where sure, you might win, I don't know, Net Zero by 2030, or whatever, but if you haven't brought the community along with you then to be honest in some ways what's the point? Where was your mandate to actually do that?

I think having a mandate is actually one of the most powerful things you can do, because then you're actually building power in a way that's going to shift power to ideally not end up in another mess down the track because you haven't done that work. I think really taking that time to invest in people and do the organizing work, do the training, and the leadership building. For Seed, in the early days when we were working out who we are and what we do, and how we do it, and there's the campaigning side of things, the movement building side of things, and the storytelling side of thing - so much of all of that was, how do we build not just the leadership of young people to be "leaders" in their communities? Because there's all these Indigenous leadership programs out there that do all this leadership stuff and then basically throw people out into the world, and say 'good luck', but that's not what we were about. It's like, how do we build up people in a way that gives them what they need to be leading action in their communities, and that leadership comes in all sorts of shapes and forms, but doing so in a way that we're building transferable skills and building their confidence and knowledge. Even now you look at where Seed volunteers and staff who got involved over the years, they're working in all these different spaces, whether it's in activism and advocacy, or in creative arts and music, and like Vanessa in the Northern Territory who is leading a language revival program, it's amazing! How we build the capacity of us for that bigger vision, I think, is so important.

Grace Vegesana

Community is what we need to win. I think that's a really beautiful place to leave it.