

Fighting Disinformation and Transphobia with Alex Kelly and Jackie Turner - Transcript

Alex Kelly

Welcome to the Commons Conversations Podcast. I'm Alex Kelly. I'm an activist, I'm a filmmaker, and I currently work at the Economic Media Center at Australian Progress. Today I'm hosting this podcast from where I live on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, where it's Wurrumuk and Dhurunguk season. Wurrumuk is the long-necked turtle, and Dhurunguk is the Flax-lily. It's a wet spring here. It's beautiful, and I pay my respects to Djaara elders past and present, to all First Nations people tuning in. Wherever we are across this vast continent of hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations, sovereignty was never ceded.

To open this podcast, I'll just quickly position myself. I'm a white, cisgendered queer woman in my 40s, and I use she/her pronouns. I've done a bit of work in solidarity with the trans community in different capacities, most recently through my work on the film 'The Dreamlife of Georgie Stone.' So I just want to open by saying I'm a huge fan of your work, Jackie, and I'm pretty wowed by the impact you and the Trans Justice Project have made in just a few years. So welcome.

Jackie Turner

Thanks for having me. Yeah, that's wonderful to hear. Thanks so much.

Alex Kelly

So can you let us know a bit about yourself and how you came to start the Trans Justice Project?

Jackie Turner

Yeah, so my name's Jackie. My pronouns are she and her. So I grew up on Jaggera and Turrbal Country in Brisbane, and I now live on Gadigal Country in so-called Sydney. So I've spent the last 10 to 12 years as an organizer and campaigner, but I spent the first eight of that working on climate change and economic justice.

So growing up in Queensland, I was getting involved in local campaigns in Queensland right when they were trying to open up the Galilee Basin, which, for those who haven't heard of that before, it's a huge coal deposit in central Queensland, and there was a planned expansion that would have involved a whole bunch of coal ports along the Queensland coast, and we were part of a bunch of groups who were trying to stop that expansion going ahead, obviously for the risks that were posed to our climate.

So I very much cut my teeth as a community organizer working on campuses, like organizing young people and students, teaching them how to do protest and meet with decision makers and build power in their communities. And it wasn't until a few years back that I affirmed my gender and came out as a trans woman. And it was around the same time when we were seeing what was happening in the US and the UK starting to emerge with the really targeted attacks on trans community. It was a real decision point for me, because I had spent my life kind of building these skills, right? And then at the same time where I'm kind of going through my own personal journey with my gender, I'm seeing a place where I can potentially make a really big difference. And those skills are really needed in campaigning and organizing in the queer community and stuff. So I started the Trans Justice Project basically two years ago, to serve as a campaigning organization dedicated to fighting for trans and gender diverse people and our rights and welfare in Australia.

Alex Kelly

Amazing. And what are some of the similarities and differences from doing that climate work to then moving into a campaigning space that is, like, connected to your own lived experience? Has that been a big shift?

Jackie Turner

Yeah, it's actually been a huge shift and learning journey. I think lots of people can relate, particularly like, if you've previously been able bodied and then you have a disability later in life, or, yeah, you come out as trans later in life, having been, you know, read as a cis white guy. The experience of encountering discrimination is pretty eye opening, I think, and changes your perspective on things quite a bit. I've always been a queer person, and have never been read as straight, but I think that the learning journey of going through your own transition and everything, changes your perspective so much on the world, but then also the simultaneous thing of currently, you know, fighting on your own rights, you're going up against people who aren't just opposed to your politics, but actually you personally. So I think it's been interesting to just note how much more this work affects me now, how much more I need to do to protect myself from the impacts of it, but also how much more it means to me.

And so I had spent my whole life growing up really not knowing any trans people at all, who I was friends with, and in the last couple of years, I've just met hundreds of trans people. That's like, made a profound

difference in my life and how I see myself in the world, you know, just understanding that there are other people out there who are like you. There's been lots of differences on the personal basis of being a campaigner on, you know, something that you live, but I think the other thing is that the climate movement is just so different culturally to the queer community. For one thing the climate movement has really good movement infrastructure. You know, there's a whole bunch of stuff that we've set up over the last 20 years in terms of training and resources like The Commons and, you know, funding bodies and all this sort of stuff. Even our political understandings of things and training resources and stuff, that doesn't really exist in the same way in the LGBT community and so that kind of fighting movement building infrastructure I think really hasn't been built that much. And so it was interesting having to kind of build some things from the ground up.

Alex Kelly

It doesn't exist yet, but you're certainly part of a wave of people that are building some of that infrastructure and that content.

Jackie Turner

Yeah, totally. And I will say, it makes it sound like I'm the only one doing that, from what I just said, and obviously I'm not. But that also this has been a lot of the difference between the LGBT community and coming from the climate movement, is that a lot of the big mass protest, highly effective campaigns that we've seen in the past have now become legitimate health bodies or community organizations or whatever, and receive government funding and all this sort of stuff. So it's like these cycles of institutionalization, which, you know, is great that there are services there for people, but then that kind of grassroots campaigning and everything also kind of needs to be reinvented again, I think, a generation later. So I think that's kind of what may be happening now.

Alex Kelly

Yeah, these are great observations, and I'd love to come back to pick up some of what you're saying about how to look after yourself, and the personal impacts as a lived experience campaigner, and also the impacts of visibility, or lack of visibility for trans people and trans people finding each other. But maybe if we just zoom out for a moment, we're recording this conversation in early December 2024. We're looking at an election in Australia sometime in the next six months, and we're still processing what a Trump re-election means, and we're over 12 months into Israel's war on Gaza. What are the kind of headlines for you? What's happening right now? Just paint a bit of a picture of the current moment. I mean, no pressure. Say polycrisis, and we could just keep going or, I mean, specifically for you and the work you're doing.

Jackie Turner

Look, it's a really challenging moment. Obviously, the Trump presidency is terrible for trans people. I think as well, what's happening in the UK, where there's soon to be a case basically on whether trans women can be recognized as women legally. If we don't win that case, then that will kind of unpick a lot of the anti discrimination protections that trans people have. And we're seeing these attacks start to emerge in Australia. Yeah, it's a really challenging time. I know that for lots of trans young people at the moment, they're really concerned about what this means for them. It is interesting talking to elders at this moment as well, who are kind of remembering about what it was like back in the 70s and 80s, before there was really any literacy around trans people at all, and how these kind of moments compare across. I get the profound feeling that everything is a bloody mess at the moment. And it's really hard to know a way forward right now.

It feels like the Trump election kind of throws up a lot of things in the air around democracy and how we deal with the geopolitical implications of that presidency, as well as, you know, I think a lot about climate change, right? So, how do we deal with the fact that climate change isn't really an election issue in Australia? Like, we know that we need to massively bring down our exports. We know that we need massive investment in renewables still, there's all this stuff that needs to happen right now, and it feels like this presidency couldn't happen at a worse time. Sorry, it's a bit of a grim answer. I think I'm trying to find some people at the moment who have a lot of inspiration and stuff. And I think where I'm seeing that at the moment, you know, I went to Newcastle Rising Tide, and that was really wonderful to be a part of. People there are really cutting through into the mainstream, which is really inspiring, and also seeing that people have taken the election of Trump and what that could mean for Australia really seriously. And people are really seriously talking about the far right, about the infrastructure that they've built, and about what we actually need to do differently going forward. I don't know how you're feeling at the moment.

Alex Kelly

Yeah, I think something that you said resonated for me about finding people. One of the additional layers of the crises we're in is, you know, the hyper individualism and the fragmentation from each other. And, of course, none of us can actually wrap our heads around and articulate all of the things that are interacting and going on simultaneously, between the climate crisis, the rise of the tech bros, you know what's happening culturally, politically, geopolitically, in the kind of military industrial complex, all these things at once. And so for me, I often come back to just really trying to remind myself to find the others, and to remember that this is a collective response. Like, the only way we can respond is collectively.

Yeah, I think one of the things I also just wanted to pick up on that I think is an additional, and we will come to some positives in a moment, but yeah, an additional kind of challenge is, you were talking about

in the queer movement that a lot of Pride was a protest and was led by incredible trans women of colour and so many elements. You know, there's a really complex thing here, where it's incredible that things become mainstream, it's wonderful that the Mardi Gras is broadcast on television. It's fantastic that lots of LGBTIQ+ grassroots entities have grown into being institutions that deliver social services across the queer community. But I think what you were sort of touching on is that there's also a challenge when movements kind of put on their button-up shirts and become a bit more centrist and liberal, if we don't still have the radical wave pushing, we see how the centre gets pulled to the right, and people become less bold. Where do you see the Trans Justice Project in that spectrum of organizations and boldness, etc?

Jackie Turner

Yeah, it's, you know, it's one of the reasons why we decided an organization was necessary, is because, you know, when we think about, for example, the four roles that Bill Moyers talks about, who, for folks who aren't familiar with that, it's just four roles in a social movement a framework for thinking about the different roles that organizations and leaders play. We have a lot of folks who are really effective reformers and citizens, but actually not a lot of people who do long term organizing work, who are the changemakers. So I think we very much see ourselves as a power building organization that needs to work to not only mobilize the base, but also be engaging the middle and working to do positive polarization on the issue of Trans Justice.

Alex Kelly

Could you unpack positive polarization?

Jackie Turner

So polarization is just a term that we use to talk about basically making the public pick a side. So it's about framing an issue so that people are either for or against it. We've seen it used really effectively, like, I think the Black Lives Matter movement is a great example of where polarization has been highly effective in winning over the undecideds in the public, and actually educating a whole bunch of people about the ways in which white supremacy works in their society, and the ways that they can be an ally and help to undo those systems of power.

You can obviously have positive and negative polarization. So positive polarization is just where most people side with you, and the negative one is where you turn most people away. It's unfortunate, you know, we talk a lot, especially in disinformation world, about how polarized things have become. And I think that there's definitely risks with using this kind of work, but it's kind of the bread and butter of

social movements to make people pick a side, whether they support or oppose a people, an issue, yeah, and we use it a lot to sort of get people to take a moral stand, basically.

So I think that our job is to shift the realm of debate, and basically make it so that we have the power to change the discussions that are happening right now, to broaden the fight, to bring allies in with, you know, hopefully bold and exciting actions and campaigns that people can see themselves being a part of and joining. And hopefully that helps strengthen the rest of the movement that we're working in, right? It helps the people who are trying to do reform. It helps the people who are trying to get their workplace to bring in a better policy, or whatever. We're hoping that it kind of shifts the rock overall.

Alex Kelly

I mean, I think both from Bill Moyers' four roles in social movements, but also talking through the lens of movement ecology, we know we need everything. We need all kinds of actors and different ways of engaging. And we definitely need to be networked so we can back each other in, in all of those different roles that are happening.

Jackie Turner

Yeah, I think one other element that I might just mention on this too is part of our agenda has been around how we broaden the frame. So, for instance, a lot of the conversation, because it's been a lot of health organizations that have been really leading this work, a lot of the asks that people have made of decision makers and the public is around, you know, increased funding for services. It's around legal recognition of gender, you know, really important issues.

But I think there's a bit of a missing piece here around actually just the real material issues that trans people face: that one in five of us experiences homelessness as a youth. Our unemployment rate is three times the national rate. There are real issues with poverty in our community that are reinforced by the kinds of marginalization that we specifically face. So I think there's a big thing here around like, actually, how do we improve the material conditions of trans and gender diverse people? And these are fundamentally like economic and working class issues, and they're not issues that are only born by trans people, right? All communities which are scapegoated by the politically powerful face really similar things. We get discriminated against in our workplaces. We find it hard to find employment, we find it hard to find stable housing.

And so I think part of what our mission has been too is actually bringing trans and gender diverse people into a broader discussion about how our society treats minorities, how it treats working people, and trying to expand that frame, so that people don't just see it as an LGBT issue, but that this is actually a social justice issue more broadly.

Alex Kelly

Yeah, it's definitely something I've thought about a lot. One of the projects that we've worked on together this year has been Australian Progress have been bringing together this strengthening democracy learning circle, and one of the reasons we really wanted to have you in that room is because I think there's a lot that other movements and campaigns can learn from trans organizers, which I don't think is necessarily immediately apparent to someone who might be in an environmental organization or working on, you know, a wage campaign, or in the union movement.

But I think when people start listening to the kind of organizing that you're doing and the success you're having, and we'll come to disinformation in a moment, but I think what you're raising about, like the economic conditions, that you can see the patterns across different marginal communities is really necessary. How has your experience of coalition building beyond the queer and trans community been in that way?

Jackie Turner

So we haven't built a coalition, per se, but what we've been really trying to do is get people to take, you know, actions alongside of us. So we had a letter of solidarity, a statement of solidarity, that about, I think it's up to 230 or 240 organizations signed on to last year in support of the trans community, defending against attacks on our rights, health care and lives. I think that people really understand in civil society that, you know, the Right is using this as a way to build their own political power and influence. That we're trying to be used as a wedge issue so that people can try to win and hang on to power.

And so I found the solidarity across the movement actually pretty inspiring. You know, the union movement particularly, has been really staunch in supporting us. I've been really proactive in trying to make those relationships and get people to understand what our shared stake is in this fight. I think that previously, most people if you're working in an NGO or something like that, you may actually have never met to your knowledge, a trans person before, and so I actually think that part of the early strategy of the Trans Justice Project, last year, was actually just me meeting as many people as possible so that they had met a trans person. They knew who they could ask for help. They knew that they could pick up the phone to someone who would have some answers for them. They knew where to go for information, this sort of stuff.

And just alone, that kind of network building and relationship building, I think has done wonders for folks feeling much more confident in being able to navigate this stuff, because we're finding, the sort of anti-trans politics stuff is coming up through people's grassroots groups and all this sort of stuff, and they're wondering how to how to deal with it. And so we've kind of been able to be there for people a little bit to provide some resources and provide some input, prepare them for how to deal with it.

Alex Kelly

I mean that kind of relational work and capacity building. I think sometimes when we talk about campaigns and we're thinking about big picture strategy and stuff, we don't necessarily always just recognize how significant that relational work is, and especially when it enables people to build trust, to ask questions, that then once they feel more comfortable and have a greater understanding, they're more emboldened to act also in solidarity. So it's sometimes like, we think we're going to do things that are far further down the track, and then we realize it's the nuts and bolts of building those connections is really fundamental to the work.

Jackie Turner

Totally. And I think this is part of the disinformation stuff for us, you know, what our opponents are really banking on is that people don't know anything about our community, that they can tell lies about us and that people will believe them. Some recent polling that was done in the US found that 75% of anti-trans-young people, so this is people under 25 who are anti-trans, in the US did not know someone who was trans. We also know from polling in Australia that if you know someone, or have a relationship with someone who's trans or gender diverse, that you're far more likely, it's like 98%, far more likely, to support us having equal rights and protections as everyone else.

It's like, oh, okay, the relationships are actually really important for people's resiliency to disinformation hate campaigns, and also for political outcomes. And so one of the most powerful things we can do is actually just getting out and meeting people, which, you know, is good for me. I like people, so it's nice to make those connections and everything. But I think, as well, going back to the thing about how, you know, it's not unique, right? Like, I've been reflecting on how lots of other movements have gone through similar phases. And our comrades in the Muslim community, the kinds of disinformation and hate campaigns that they were subjected to after September 11, I've really been renarrativizing that in my head, or you know, mulling it over in my head and understanding the damage that that must have done to their community and must continue to do, and how relationships are so important there, because it's like it's all based on feeding people's fear and suspicions and prejudices. But again, relationships make people so much more resilient to that disinformation and hate.

Alex Kelly

And I think we're seeing just how intentional we have to be right now, as the economic crisis becomes more and more severe, and just day to day material conditions for most people, and the cost of living, access to housing, as these things bite, we see, you know, Trump, Dutton, many others, try and weaponize racism, transphobia, blame other people.

And so the work of stitching together communities so we don't blame each other, but we blame the system and we demand more from governments and our institutions, is so important so we don't turn against each other. You know, what we're seeing play out in the US just shows, you know, talking about polarization before, the deliberate polarization that's happening there, and how it's turning people against each other, is really worrying. But I want to pick up on the disinformation piece. Before we get into the work you're doing in the space, could you share your working definitions? Do you use the terms misinformation, disinformation, hate speech? How do you come into this?

Jackie Turner

Yes, so misinformation, we're talking about information that is incorrect but it's not intentional. You know, someone shares something that they think is true on Facebook or whatever, but the facts of it are wrong or something. It's not created to manipulate. Disinformation is specifically information that is created to manipulate the reader, to either omit important context, to omit important details, or data, to provide a biased view of things. So yeah, we distinguish between this a lot, because there's a lot of misinformation about trans people, but not all of it is as insidious as the disinformation that we deal with.

Alex Kelly

And is misinformation, does that mean that it's a bit easier to address? Like you can just say to someone, 'oh, hey, that's not true. This is the truth.' And they're like, 'Okay, cool.' Whereas disinformation is harder because it's more insidious? Or are both difficult to challenge?

Jackie Turner

I think the misinformation is probably easier because it feels a little more light, whereas I think what we're seeing now is the disinformation that is spread about trans people is usually connected to a broader political community that doesn't support trans people's bodily autonomy or freedom. So I think the disinformation specifically is usually rooted in a really deep hatred of our community. Sorry, I'm laughing about it, but it's funny to think about the extremities of that, right? Because, yeah, there's lots of misinformation, right? That people might just be like, 'oh, you know, trans people are XYZ,' but it can be a simple conversation to undo that, whereas I don't think that's always true with the disinformation work.

Alex Kelly

Staying in the big picture for a moment, how does misinformation and disinformation show up in particular for the trans community? And then who is actually behind this and why?

Jackie Turner

Firstly, up front, there's always been misinformation about our communities. There's misinformation about all minorities. What we're dealing with specifically right now is a really coordinated campaign of disinformation that's aimed at taking away our rights and access to health care. And so the kinds of disinformation that we're dealing with is kind of coming out of, you know, we deal a lot with medical disinformation, which is basically in the last few years there's been about 20 or so organizations that have been started that focus specifically on producing and disseminating anti-trans disinformation, particularly on medical disinformation. So aiming to erode the medical consensus on trans healthcare that is gender affirming healthcare. They have spent these last four or so years working to produce bunk evidence, coordinating with anti-trans actors globally, and lobbying governments to restrict or ban gender affirming care in their countries.

Some of these organizations include Genspect, who's very active in the UK, and SEGM, who's The Society for Evidence-Based Gender Medicine. They have very official sounding names. SEGM has done a lot of work in the US and helping to provide 'expert' witnesses for these court cases. For folks who are really familiar with things like astroturfing, where you basically set up a fake grassroots movement, that's what's playing out here. So we saw in the early days of the sort of anti-climate change movement that organizations like the Heritage Foundation, far-right think tanks put millions of dollars into funding basically every climate skeptic, geo engineer, you know, conspiracy theorist they could, and then funded their institutes, got them on the news, talking with Fox News and these sorts of folks to really muddy the waters around the science of climate change. And we're still feeling the impacts of that in 2024, this misinformation that they managed to get aired.

And now they're these same organizations, I believe, are doing the same thing on trans healthcare. These organizations have gotten a ton of money, are working and coordinating internationally. A bunch of ex-gay organizations, like conversion practice organizations, are now fully focused on anti-trans and like conversion practices for trans people. So we're seeing a real constellation of actors who are working on a shared strategy. They coordinate really well together. They have really strong shared communications. And I think that that's really what's been behind the eroding of trans healthcare in the UK and the US. And now those actors are getting active here, so a big part of our job is trying to stop them basically having influence in Australia by trying to protect the medical bodies that protect the standards around how trans people are treated and how trans healthcare is done in Australia, but also trying to prevent their political influence, so that Members of Parliament aren't supporting this stuff without knowing what it's really about.

Alex Kelly

So that mapping of that constellation, and seeing what they're doing in the UK, in the US, and trying to sort of get out ahead of it here and warn people and show people who these astroturf and fake front groups are, so that they recognize them and their tactics is so important. I just sort of wanted to ask as well, like, why? Why are they going to all this effort? I mean, aside from the fact that it's like, immoral and cruel, what's the political benefit? Or, I mean, I guess it must be a mash of religion, politics, power wedging. Like, what's going on? Why are they doing this?

Jackie Turner

It's really interesting, right? I think that people assume that it's religious often, and actually, most of these groups that I'm talking about are secular. They have connections with the religious, you know, what they call ex-gay organizations. But a lot of these groups are targeting, basically 'concerned parents' in inverted commas, and so they want to come off more as secular expert bodies. Yeah, I've spent a lot of time thinking about why they're doing this. I think that a bunch of them think that they're doing the right thing, basically. I find it hard to believe that they could do all of this just through hate, because it's such a huge thing to have to set up and a life's work to campaign against our community.

But I genuinely believe that some of them believe that they're doing the right thing. They don't believe the evidence. They don't believe the science, much like, you know, other conspiracy theorists, right? They think that everyone else is deluded, and they're the only one who sees the truth. And I think that it happens to be that these organizations were at the right place at the right time. You know, when we think about the shift after marriage equality that all of these far-right organizations did, they stopped talking about gay people and they started talking about trans people instead, because they knew that they'd lost the war on convincing the public that gay people were a threat to society. And so they moved to trans people.

And so I think a little bit of it is serendipitous that you know, they might have been writing their articles in total anonymity for a long time before money came along to support this stuff. And we see that with some of the actors right, some of the people who have been spouting these views have been doing it since the 80s, and now all of a sudden they're getting asked to speak on panels and podcasts and all this sort of stuff as 'esteemed experts' on trans people.

And yeah, I think it is because this is politically advantageous for the Right. They want to use trans people as really a battle over conservative values. They want to be able to point to us as not only a violation of the family unit, but actually a violation of, and this is very much under the hood stuff, but a violation of what it really means to have two distinct genders, you know, and they really believe that being a man is something that's important, and being a woman is something that's important, and both those things should be separate and distinct. And they see trans people as really overthrowing what they see as the natural order. Long story short, yeah.

Alex Kelly

I mean, I just want to scream. 'But why?! But why?!'

Jackie Turner

Totally, I know, they're very concerned about gender. I could talk all day about this. I'm not sure if that's super interesting, the ins and outs of conservative gender anxiety, because it's actually fascinating when you start looking at it, particularly in when we think about child raising. Because some of the stuff that they talk about, which I've obviously spent a long time looking at these conservative talk shows and that sort of stuff, to understand their brains. But like, some of the things, are so paranoid that they think, firstly, that gender is natural and innate, and like, from God. You are a man because you're a man, and, God made you a man. So that's why that works.

But they also simultaneously think that if you go to a drag show, that you might become gay or you might become a trans person, and it's just like, 'wow, so gender is ordained from God. But like, also, it's incredibly fragile that one drag queen could bring it all tumbling down.'

Alex Kelly

Fascinating. And thank you for doing all of that research on behalf of everybody else who doesn't want to tune into all this. And I think what's so hard to listen to about it, is that, you know, the whole 'won't you think of the children' thing. I've got young kids, I'm still getting my head around parenting, but it's very clear that for trans and gender diverse people, the health outcomes, people's well being, is so much better if you've got the love and support of your family. It's like such an awful kind of inversion of what it actually means to be a good parent or carer, which is just to show up for people, whoever they are.

Jackie Turner

100%.

Alex Kelly

So it's quite hard to hear, so I appreciate the time. And I guess the other thing I was thinking when you were talking is, like, the other factor in all of this is that we've had really big shifts in the media landscape

and the financial security of a lot of media outlets has been really changing a lot with the internet and how people raise revenue, and so the rise of clickbait and outrage and these things I think have also driven polarizing media and a real thirst for conflict. I think that has a really big role in all of this as well.

And I guess that sort of brings me to wanting to ask you about some of the research, research and resources that you've been producing. And maybe you could walk us through a bit about the Anti-trans Disinformation Handbook, like, how did that come about? What's the kind of executive summary, and how are people responding to it?

Jackie Turner

Yeah, so we released the Anti-trans Disinformation Handbook in August. I think it's basically a handbook. We wanted to pull together a bunch of what we'd learned around combating disinformation against the trans community into one handbook. So a lot of what people ask for in this space is like, they want to be able to correct the facts, right? But I think you and I both know as campaigners that that's not always the most effective way. Mythbusting often backfires and we end up arguing in the opponent's frame.

So we wanted to provide a resource that had the research outlined there, but also had responses that people could use and responding to this stuff in media, in civil society, media releases, all that sort of stuff, to give people that reframing. Because at the moment, it feels like the entire conversation about trans people is happening in the opponent's frame. They're really running the debate, like, whenever we get asked about issues, it's often about trans sport. Very few trans people are playing sport at the elite level, especially now. You know, these are not the issues that we really want to be talking about.

We want to be talking about healthcare and housing and these sorts of things. So we produced this guide as a way to give people the evidence so that they could use that, but also have proper responses to this stuff in their work. So it covers, I think, 9 or 10 key themes that we see come out around, particularly the healthcare of trans and gender diverse people, and gives people a bit of a framework for how they can respond to this stuff. So we included four principles that underline the work that we do, like not boosting stuff in the algorithms, being really conscious of when it's necessary to delegitimize and respond to opponents, you know, making sure that we're responding in our own frames and telling our own story, rather than just taking the opponent's arguments on face value.

And so it's been actually really well received. So it's been downloaded more than 1500 times now, and been accessed by folks in 35+ countries, which is awesome. So it's great. I can go on the back end and look at sort of who's downloading it and everything. And it's just wonderful to see people from Japan, Canada, New Zealand, you know, the UK, all of these different places, downloading and using the resource. I'm hoping that it's a real inspiration for people on how they can make resources like this for their own context as well, not just doing mythbusting sort of fact sheets and stuff, but actually combining them with messaging and strategy so that they can be used by campaigning groups more effectively. So I think that, in combination with the conversations guide that we've released, will hopefully be the key

resources that we'll be relying on, particularly in the lead up to the next election, on how to respond to the stuff that comes up, so that people have that messaging, that resourcing. We can also use this to help inoculate politicians and everything who might be caught off guard by this stuff too.

The project was supported by the Amplify Pride Fund, who gave us some cash towards making it possible, which was great as well. It's, yeah, it's been great to see the response to it. We've also gotten a lot of people sending it through, saying that they've sent it around to their whole office and some in their research places. So it's really great to have something there. I think people were really waiting for something that kind of put it all together for folks.

Alex Kelly

Congratulations. I think probably a lot of people listening have released guides, reports, research papers, etc, that they might struggle to get the take up, like that's amazing, in just a few months to have 1500 people from 35 countries, you know, accessing it and giving you feedback about how they're using it. That's amazing. I just wanted to pick up on one word that you used, and maybe you could give us an example, could you talk about inoculation?

Jackie Turner

Sure. So inoculation basically comes from the idea of, like, vaccination, right? Like, you give people a little bit of the virus to make them more resilient to the real virus. And so in disinformation work, we use this as a way of introducing people to the opponent's messages in a safe, controlled environment, telling them what they're going to say, unpacking why they've said it, and what the motivations are behind that message, and then telling them what we actually want. And so it's a way of introducing your base to this stuff, so that they're less susceptible to it.

It's actually funny, I did a bunch of testing on this beforehand. This is like a little look under the hood. I'll often just debate with people on Facebook for research, to see what they say, right? Or on Twitter or whatever. So, like, I got into a discussion with someone who shared a TERF article, who I knew was a committed feminist, and was just like, 'Oh, hey, I just saw that you shared this article, and I wanted to understand why you shared it, you know, like, I find it really interesting that you did blah, blah,' and we sort of talked it through and her concerns and everything, and I was just like, 'oh, that's really fascinating to know why she had.' It was one of the articles that's talking about the erasure of women, the word 'woman,' from health services, which isn't true, but she saw that as a real attack on women's health, which is totally fair enough, right? Like, we need more investment in women's health. And she saw it as like, 'Oh, they're trying to bury it so that they don't have to put more funding into it and more research.' And I was like, oh, that's really good to know so that we can bring this into the work that we do around this as well, and understanding how to actually assess what people's real fears are with these messages,

and what frameworks and fears are being triggered for them when they see this stuff out in the wild. So anyway, we had a good chat about it, and I was like, 'Okay, so here's why I wanted to talk to you about it. This is actually a TERF article.' And she was just like, 'Oh my God. Are you serious? Oh, I did not pick that up at all.' And we had a really good conversation about why it have been framed that way and everything.

So I think these conversations can be really helpful. And I think sometimes we shy away from people when they share one bad article, you know, because we're kind of primed to have to fight people. But I think part of the disinformation thing is actually understanding that it preys on people's lack of knowledge. So actually, they're not often super committed to this stuff. And actually a simple conversation can go a long way to not only winning them back over, but also making them more resilient to this stuff in the future.

So we've done a lot around inoculating, particularly civil society, around this stuff. And part of what we did, I think, in like, the first month of the Trans Justice Project, was hold the civil society briefing that basically was like, 'this is the anti-trans lobby. Here's why they're doing what they're doing. Here's what they'll say about us. Here's how you prepare your organizations so that you're more resilient to this stuff as it comes up, internally, externally, and here's how you stand in solidarity with trans people.' And yeah, I think that's been incredibly effective in just like people understanding now as this stuff comes up, they've seen it before, right? And can respond to it differently.

Alex Kelly

I guess my observation of the work that the Zoe Bell Gender Collective and Transcend, and the Gender Center, as well as the Trans Justice Project doing that, you know, as we were talking about before, like relational workshops in schools and with health workers and so on, seems to have gone a long way to kind of inoculating people against some of the anti-trans health messaging, particularly coming out of the UK. Is that fair to say? Is that what you're seeing happening?

Jackie Turner

Yes, definitely. And you know, there's been decades of work done by advocates in that space to build up networks of allies and supportive doctors. And, you know, there's a professional association for trans healthcare now that people can join and get trained by and everything. So a lot of that work has been really successful. I think this is the other thing that I was going to say just on the inoculation work is, the other dynamic of this is power, right? So when we think about the kind of thing that's happening in the US right now, where we're seeing bans on gender affirming care all across these different states, the evidence doesn't matter in those places.

And it's one of these things where for the last little while, evidence has really been important, and has been really important for us to build up the evidence based on gender affirming care, make it clear that it does improve people's lives and improve access for people off the back of that. And I think one of the things that we're worried about now is that political attacks will erode, not the evidence base, but actually the political will, or support within certain bodies and that sort of stuff.

So it's important that that work continues and that we keep having those conversations. But also, like, it's not immune from that broader context as well. It's fascinating watching what's happening in the US, because basically all of the medical associations, like all of the health bodies, are all opposed to the bans that are happening right now on gender affirming care, and we're now approaching basically a federal ban on proven healthcare. So I guess my point is that both things matter, like that political fight matters, and also the internal skills building and relationship building as well.

Alex Kelly

And I think you speak to something else that I found it took me a while to kind of learn, because I think, you know, in a lot of Western thinking, we think about progress as linear, and things just get better and better. And in movements you win a reform, then you win the next one, and then you just keep getting better and better. And for me, I think the biggest lesson around this was both First Nations justice, but in particular asylum seeker solidarity campaigns that I was involved in.

You know, I was very involved in the Woomera 2002 protests, and Baxter the year after. And I presumed that as we broke the fences and these centres got closed down, that there would be a natural progression where things got better. And I think what you're saying about like, people are not immune, you don't just challenge these immoral and factually incorrect positions once, and then it's sorted, like, we remain in a lot of contests across the board. And I think that's one of the things that can be so fatiguing, is that we never get a final clean victory, and sometimes we're actually defending ground rather than pushing forward. Yeah, how does it feel in that text at the moment?

Jackie Turner

Totally, yeah. I think a lot of people are feeling that way. There's been huge advances in the last 10 years on trans rights in Australia, like, just even marriage equality. Many trans people weren't allowed to be married and had to get divorced if they transitioned before marriage equality passed, and birth certificate laws are pretty recent for lots of states. But I think that's right, and it's why I'm so motivated around this, is because we've seen from what's happened in the UK that there's just a massive potential for things to get quite bad for the trans community. And it's interesting seeing some of the rhetoric around Trump and people saying, 'oh, you know, we're so lucky that in Australia, that kind of thing could never happen here.' But like you were saying with refugee campaigns, Australia has given inspiration to

the UK and the US on its cruelty towards people seeking asylum. I think we sometimes forget some of the horrors that are really happening in this country.

What's really clear to me at the moment is that without action, there's nothing stopping Australia from going down the same route as the US and the UK on trans rights, and we see this with a whole bunch of campaigns, that they test out messaging and strategies in the US and the UK and other countries, and then they export it elsewhere.

When we think about things like the Atlas Network or other organizations that are working together across conservative issues, they test out something somewhere and they bring it to the next place. So we have the advantage that I think that we're many steps ahead of where many other countries were on trans issues before these campaigns got started, and we've also seen what's happened in these other places, so we know what their playbook is.

So I'm actually quite optimistic about the future in Australia on this. I believe that we will win. I think there's going to be a lot of harm done from these campaigns, but that actually the kinds of tactics that they're using here already haven't worked as well as they would hope. That's a win.

Alex Kelly

And I mean, that sort of brings me quite well into what I was going to ask next, which is like, both in terms of messaging, of not stepping into the opponent's frame, but also the complexity in a community of holding the truth of the ways in which the trans community is marginalized, and there are real, material challenges for people.

But one of the things I've always found quite powerfully contagious is trans joy, and the insistence on you know, trans euphoria and the strength in the movement and amongst trans people. So I just wonder if you could speak to that for a moment. Like, yeah, you talked about connecting with lots of trans people yourself earlier, yeah, how do you hold the truth of what you're up against with the strength that you find in your community?

Jackie Turner

I think the reality for a lot of us is that we have spent a lifetime fighting against messages from society that what we are is not okay, and coming out the other side of that to find community, to affirm who you are, and to build a life for yourself in direct opposition to the narratives that society tells us, takes an incredible amount of resilience and internal strength. And I think that means that for a lot of us, we have been forced to live life on our own terms. We have been forced to do things, make unconventional choices. We've had to find family. And it's meant that for a lot of us, I think that people have a lot to

learn from us about what it means to live a life that is based on principles, based on alignment with who you are and what you will and won't do, you know, based on living your truth.

And I think that the story of the trans community is one of kind of eternal resistance. For many of us, there's not the option to hide away, and there's not the option to hide who we are in the society, and so we choose to bear the consequences of that so that we can actually live our lives as we see fit.

So I find a lot of strength in our community from being around other people who feel that way and who have had that journey. And you know, I talk particularly to young trans people these days, and they have already had such a much easier start to life, many of them, from just having the kind of representation that's on TV, having parents who maybe have heard of a trans person before they come out as trans, you know, having access to much better services and everything, and it's just such a stark comparison to the reality for many of us, even 10, 20 years ago. So I find a lot of hope in actually seeing how much progress has been made in such a short amount of time, and already how much better the future is going to be for the next generation.

Alex Kelly

Beautiful. I think probably there's other communities that would resonate with that idea of eternal resistance. And I would like to think that that eternal resistance is not fixed forever, that we do actually manage to bend the future towards liberation and justice for everyone.

And I guess just lastly, something that you would want to pass on to current and future campaigners, in terms of, like, right at the beginning we talked about, you know, just the particular challenges of being an organizer working in your own lived experience, and also in your personal life, this eternal resistance. I don't even want to frame it, whether it's hope or inspiration or self care.

Jackie Turner

I think a couple of big things that have really changed the way I view myself in doing this work every day. One thing, knowing your history and learning about the people who've come before you, the choices that they have had to make, the sacrifices they have made for us to be able to be here. And I think making friends and getting to know the elders in your community can be really helpful there too, because a lot of that history isn't written down. I think the other thing is just being really clear with yourself about what your role is, because we navigate many different personas and responsibilities in our communities, and there's a job that you have as a campaigner that you need to play, and then there's also a person who you need to be as a community member as well.

And I think you need to give yourself license to do both of those things. Part of what has kept me sane is being really clear about what my role is and isn't at any one time. So like not feeling like I have to do

everything, knowing that there's lots of other people out there who are working on this too, and that the most effective and important thing I can do is to play my role as effectively as I can and leave everyone else to play theirs. I think the final thing is just finding those people who are on the same page as you, who you can trust. Unfortunately, in communities always there's going to be conflicts. There's going to be people who you disagree with and that sort of stuff.

So I think finding those people who you can have around you, who are your ride or dies, who are your trusted, people who you're in solidarity with, is really important. And you know, making those to be really nurturing relationships, where you can complain about a shit day and all that sort of stuff, and you can bounce ideas off as well, who'll give you the advice that you need as well that people around you may not be able to give you.

Alex Kelly

Thank you. This has been such an awesome conversation. I feel very nourished by it. So thank you so much for joining us on Commons Conversations, Jackie Turner,

Jackie Turner

Well, thanks so much for having me.

Alex Kelly

Awesome. Thanks everyone. Thanks to 3CR and the Commons Library, Ian McIntyre, Holly Hammond and the entire Commons Social Change Library team. I've been Alex Kelly, and I've been joined by the wonderful Jackie Turner from the Trans Justice Project.