CREATIVE RESPONDERS

In Conversation with Dr Naomi Sunderland
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Podcast Transcript:

Scotia: Hi, I'm Scotia Monkivitch, Welcome to Creative Responders, a monthly interview series from the Creative Recovery Network where we hear from creative leaders, disaster management experts, artists and community members strengthening disaster management through creativity.

I'm delighted to share with you my conversation with Dr Naomi Sunderland.

Naomi is a descendant of the Wiradjuri First Nations People and I recently became aware of her work as one of the lead researchers on The Remedy Project - which explores music as a primary cultural determinant of health for First Nations communities.

Naomi is based out of Griffith University in Meanjin, Brisbane where she is a member of the School of Health Sciences and Social Work and Creative Arts Research Institute.

She has an extensive research and publishing record in arts-health and First Nations social justice with a particular focus on creative, anti-oppressive, and trauma-informed approaches.

She was awarded an Australian Research Council Fellowship to undertake her work on the Remedy Project and is also a singer-songwriter and community music facilitator.

I hope you enjoy my conversation with Dr Naomi Sunderland

Scotia: Welcome to Creative Responders. Naomi. It's great to meet you in person on this day. It's pretty full sunny day. We're in Jaggera Turrbal country, right on the bridge, right on the river here. And so thanks for meeting with us. And your from the Wiradjuri group, is that correct?

Naomi: Thanks so much, Scotia, for the invitation and to your team. It's fantastic. And yeah we acknowledge Country here and all the custodians of this beautiful country here in Meanjin.

Scotia: I was really pleased to meet you at the recent gathering in Melbourne at the Performing and Creativity, Culture and Wellbeing Conference, which brought together really dynamic group of people from the arts and health and academia. And you were there to present the work you've been doing in Central Australia on the Remedy Project. Can you describe what the Remedy Project is and how you came to develop with your investigation Partners?

Naomi: Thanks, Scotia. The Remedy Project is an Australian Research Council funded project. It's running for three years from 2021 to 2024, so we're in a very exciting stage of

the project. The topic is around First Nations music as a determinant of health, so we're really keen to understand what First Nations music does for culture and cultural determinants of health, things like connections to country, connections to family, community, spirit, ancestors, connection to ourselves, to our identity as First Nations peoples, and also the wider determinants of health like which we often call social, environmental, political determinants of health. And those are the things that can be less directly under the influence of First Nations communities and elders and leaders. So and they affect all people in communities and society. So the health of the natural environment, for example, is one of the biggest, widest determinants of health government policies, access to services, education, health, sense of connection between members of a community, like all those things that make us feel really, really well, healthy and happy, or sometimes can really take away from our health, wellbeing and happiness.

Scotia: The relationships we hold so vital, aren't they?

Naomi: They are. They are, absolutely. And we often understand determinants of health on a continuum from stuff that's inside of us as individuals through to stuff we share with other like a few other people to whole communities, organisations, and then, you know, all people. So it's, it's can be almost anything which makes our project very interesting and we're trying to really map. It's quite exploratory because, you know, the World Health Organisation has been focussing in on health determinants for decades now, acknowledging them as the root causes of health inequality or good health. But yeah, we don't often see music and the arts included in health determinants models, strangely enough, or in corresponding health promotion strategies and policies. So our project's really mapping how far can First Nations music go to shape our mob's health, wellbeing and healing, and also that of non-Indigenous people around us.

Scotia: But it's interesting isn't it because would you acknowledge that First Nations notions of music is much broader than just how we from a Western perspective, might perceive music? Yeah. As educative truly, but also just entertainment or feeling focus.

Naomi: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. And the way that First Nations communities and individuals have you know, it's I'm careful when I say "used" music because you don't want to always put music in an instrumental relationship, it's valuable in and of itself. But in this context, communities have been using music to care for Country and people for millennia. But in First Nations cultural context, it's it is with other art forms used for education, transmission of community and cultural law - L-O-R-E lore, It's the way we learn languages, the way we teach and learn across all generations. The way we navigate through space and remember the maps and the songlines and the ways to move through and the protocols for moving through and the ways that we connect with other people and where those people might be. So song has those very old functions in cultures, and I think that would extend beyond First Nations cultures, obviously, as well. But in our project, we're also very cognisant and aware of, you know, contemporary First Nations musicians and how that cultural hybridisation has happened. And it hasn't always happened through a forced assimilation or processes of colonising that can be update uptake and hybridity across many different genres of contemporary music and traditional music for First Nations people. So in our project we say First Nations music is any music that First Nations people play or make, and that can be opera, that can be traditional restricted musics, it can be reggae. Lots of country in there, hip hop, pop, you know. So we've got a very broad and inclusive definition of First Nations music in the project.

Scotia: So it's that which is framed through the voice of First Nations people.

Naomi: Yeah, that's a nice way to put it.

Scotia: Yeah, well, it's kind of interesting, isn't it? There's a sense that when people talk about development of language. Language is formed through the sounds of Country and it comes through that visceral kind of sound in in your body as you walk on Country. So your voice holds more than just the language or music.

Naomi: Yeah. The voice and and the instrumentation. So one of our advisory group members is Uncle Bunna Lawrie, who's a legendary Aboriginal singer, songwriter and front person for Coloured Stone. And, you know, when we were all yarning about our definition of music, Uncle Bunna, as well as colleagues from overseas who were on our advisory group from Vanuatu and Aotearoa New Zealand, spoke at length about, you know, nature as the instrument. So and that's, you know, that's like playing the stones or sounding the sounds we hear in Country, but also making instruments, you know, making instruments from bamboo, for example, in Solomon Islands, and then that's gone down through Vanuatu. And then in Australia yeah, wood instruments, clap sticks and so on. But yeah, that link to Country and Culture I think is an incredibly rich and diverse tapestry obviously across Australia, but then internationally as well.

Earlier you said that music was a part of or a part of Caring for Country. How do you understand that?

Naomi: Yeah, well, I'll give you a couple of examples that might help to bring it to life. So, for example, I went up and did some training, amazing training in the Northern Territory with an organisation called We Al-li, which a lot of people around Australia are quite familiar with. Patron, Aunty Judy Atkinson, and Associate Professor, Carlie Atkinson, are the driving forces behind that. But we did training on Country there and we were sitting on, you know, on the ground in circle to do our training over five days. And we also had Aunty Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann there to do some mentoring and training for the group. And one of our, I guess obligations in as part of a very rich acknowledgement of Country and caring for Country in that kind of setting is to sing Country. So we it's a - in my understanding - and I say I have to be humble about this too, is that I'm on the learning journey with this and every community and culture may have different ways that they understand this, but we can sing Country and transfer our good energy to Country. So when we come together and play music together, for example, or have good talk on Country, we are conveying that good energy back into Country. And so a common saying which a lot of people in Australia might be familiar with is, you know, if you look after country, country looks after you. So it's one way that artists and musicians and anyone really can give back to Country is through singing that good intention you know, whenever we're on the ground, you know, just connecting really purposefully with that. So there's there's an there's all range of dance and ceremony in Traditional cultural practices that people are still practising now. And a lot of those are restricted. They're sacred cultural ceremony. And so a lot of that work is about caring for Country and maintaining that reciprocity of care between humans and the non-human environment.

But then through our study in the Remedy Project and through a lot of previous First Nations music research, we know that First Nations musicians are prolific in environmental activism. So for example, when we started yarning with professional musicians, we say one of the first questions is why do you play music? And for people like Uncle Bunna, who's a whale-dreamer, a Mirning Elder, you know, a saltwater man, his first answer is to look after the environment. That is his “why”. That is why he plays music. And it's, there's

so much that links to traditional but also contemporary cultural practices around sharing messages, communicating, and music is often, you know, one of our Wiradjuri yarners in the project, amazing musician and music facilitator Chris Anderson, who lives here locally, you might know Chris, he said “music is the strawberry jam around the pill, Naomi”. You know, and it's that soft entry advocacy that a lot of First Nations musicians are using their music for voice. And, you know, we heard stories from musicians who could not get a gig. You know, it wasn't easy to get a gig in mainstream venues, but they're using this or, you know, or let alone jobs, you know, not that many decades ago or representation in formal, you know, representative parliament. You know, people's voices were not breaking through in those settings, yet music was a way to share messages when they couldn't be shared in other ways.

Scotia: And maybe it's the same as the reciprocity - and that's such a beautiful word - of caring for Country if you care for Country, Country cares for you. There's something about that word of healing, perhaps it's healing is a common word I'm not sure, but it's a lot to what you frame around this project that you're doing. Why? Why do you think that word is important to incorporate in a project like this? And can you expand on what that means more broadly, particularly in terms of the context of your project?

Naomi: Okay. So yeah, I mean, Scotia, I know you're really familiar with arts and health practices and research, and it's an area that I've been working in for quite a while and we often go to the World Health Organisation definition of health and then tucked under that is a definition of well-being. And you know, it's along the lines of, you know, it's it's not just the absence of disease, but an aspiration, an aspirational state towards, you know, human flourishing. And in our project, and especially when we move into First Nations cultural contexts, we have to add on the word healing. So you'll often hear people talk about health and wellbeing. And in our project we've had to add on healing, and that's just in recognition of what's happening now, in terms of recognition of the pervasive impacts of historical and intergenerational trauma for First Nations people in Australia. But also I think it just opens us up. So there is some movement in music scholarship, for example, around medical ethnomusicology, which is an interesting term in and of itself. But I notice that as soon as, you know, musicians and musicologists start getting close to culture and health, this word healing can come into play because often when we're talking about healing, we move outside the dominant Western biomedical understanding of of health and wellbeing and how to promote it. So to me, healing can bring in Traditional cultural practices of health and wellbeing promotion.

Scotia: Beyond the medical model and structures

Naomi: Beyond the medical model. And it also very strongly can bring in the spiritual sides of human existence. And when we're talking arts, we're often dabbling in the spiritual anyway, right? And whether people would regard themselves as spiritual people per say, they may be having a transcendent experience through the arts that they're not accessing in other ways. And what we're finding in some of our audience research as part of the Remedy Project is that people can be incredibly open for example, after a festival performance by a First Nations musician. And part of our question we're trying to answer at the moment is how long do those audience members stay open for in terms of.

Scotia: transformational change?

Naomi: Transformational change and and change that sticks. Because I think a lot of us, you know, who love music and the arts have had amazing experiences at arts events, and

we have the warm glow, and that's actually been studied and proven that there's a warm glow after community arts events and then it has a drop off. But we really are approaching people again after, say, three or four months after a magical experience in, say, for example, Central Australia at a festival and saying, you know, when you spoke to us at the festival, you said you wanted to change these kinds of things. Can you just give us a little update? What do you think might have changed or what kind of time frame are we looking at for you to implement those changes that you're inspired to change by engaging with live music, for example? So we had the most profound discussions with audience members in Central Australia. We had majority non-Indigenous audience members responding to our survey. We had grandmothers coming saying the buck stops with me. You know, I will not let my grandies, my grandchildren, go forward with the same level of racism and ignorance that I unfortunately allowed my children to go forward with. This is the end of it. I am putting my foot down and I'm coming to educate myself and I want to pass that on to my grandchildren. So to me that's incredibly powerful. We had Principals in the audience saying, I want to change the whole curriculum. I want to use music in the arts as a way to break down, you know, basically apartheid in Australia that we're still experiencing. I want our students to learn in different ways and so their amazing aspirations. And to me that's that's an incredibly promising potential for change.

Scotia: And it's incredibly exciting to think that you have research with longevity to be able to track that, because that's one of the biggest challenges, isn't it? How do we how do we have a sense of long, long-term listening or thinking in these places of research?

Naomi: Yeah, and I think some of it can be, you know, obviously in First Nations communities, research can be a very dirty word and justifiably so. But if we do it well, research can also be a supportive practice for audience members like this, just to check in with them and say, how's it going without judgement. And ours is only, our particular part of the Remedy project is only in its pilot phase, so obviously we'll be publishing it and encouraging others to pick it up and build on what we've done and we'll be building on it. But yeah, I was really inspired by the potential and then it's just about, well, what actually changes?

Scotia: Well the term the cultural determinants of health like we within research or within broader sensibilities, we talk about indicator sets, etc.. So when you talk about cultural health determinants, that's different than the western frame of reference. It's looking at things that you mentioned earlier, the the songlines, the spiritual sensibilities, those kind of things. And I know that the World Health Alliance, World Health Organisation is looking at unpacking what that might mean, like for your project. How are you framing those cultural determinants?

Naomi: Okay, well, there's been some incredible work done in Australia around cultural health determinants, particularly in the area of social, social and emotional well-being. So I think Australia's actually really an international leader in this area and it just comes from a recognition that First Nations People's conception of what it means to be healthy and well and happy can be sometimes different. And it's incredibly holistic automatically in a lot of cases. So that's where we get, for example, models by the work that general have sort of led and it's been really popular where they talk about connection like connecting is protecting. So connecting to family, community, our traditional cultures, our sense of identity. Connecting to country, kinship systems and so on. So I think that the more we move toward First Nations led approaches to tackling health inequalities in Australia, the more we focus in almost as a first port of call on those cultural determinants of health. So we've got organisations like our partner in Central Australia, Children's Ground, which is a

national organisation but has localised interventions to tackle things like extreme poverty over a 25 year time frame. So this is culture based First Nations-led First nations-governed and First Nations-implemented ways of working to promote health, wellbeing, education. So but it's always hand in hand with those wider systemic health determinants which First Nations, communities and Elders can't necessarily reshape on their own. So, for example, elders in Arrernte Country, so around Mparntwe, Alice Springs have said, yes, we need strong culture, strong language, we need our kids to be raised in culture in their own contexts, receiving services that are culturally appropriate. They need to understand bush, tuckers, bush medicines, Traditional healing. And a lot of that is taught and learnt through songs. So that's one sort of little aspect of what we've been talking about in Central Australia. But then the next part of that conversation is we also need that wider systemic change to tackle things like extreme poverty. So then moving outward from there into coalitions and partnerships with, you know, not necessarily Indigenous specific, but, you know, influential organisations and institutions and networks that can shape those determinants for health, for example, in the legal system or for example, in education or health directs health service delivery. So while cultural determinants of health really under the leadership of First Nations people, we need to find ways that those cultural ways of working can move outward, like a ripple effect across systems. And I don't know, one of my Elders said one one time, you know, what's protective and and good for First Nations people is good for all people. And I always take that with a grain of salt because I don't want to erase difference in saying that. But there's elements there of learning from Indigenous knowledge and practices that, yeah, may have these amazing benefits for all people.

Scotia: So you you've done a lot of research with the Arrernte people. What, why was it that you chose that particular community to work with?

Naomi: Well, it was one of those things that happened when you sort of let yourself be guided as a researcher. We.. a colleague of mine, Brydie-Leigh Bartleet here at the Queensland Conservatorium at Griffith University, and I have been working in Central Australia since about 2010. Brydie started and then I was introduced into that context through Brydie and her connections and then when we put forward the Remedy Project, we wanted to go for diversity in a series of community case studies. So we're working down the East Coast in a sort of networked case study led by Professor Phil Graham at the University of Sunshine Coast and Uncle Kev Starkey from Dark Wood Studios up at Gympie and then over in the Kimberleys, so that work's being led by Dr. Darren Garvey from the University of Queensland and Professor Clint Bracknell, also from University of Queensland, and an amazing PhD candidate there, Brigitta Scarfe. And then we wanted to have something sort of in the centre. So we just started talking to people openly and it happened through referral. So it was actually a traditional custodian from Kabi Kabi Country, who I was talking to, Kerry Neil and he said, Naomi, you should ring this person and talk to them about that. And so I rang that person and then that person said, you should ring this person and then you should ring this person. And it ended up with us putting in an EOI to the National Research and Evaluation Director for Children's Ground, which is it's an incredible organisation, people, if you haven't heard of it, please do look them up. They are just amazing and they've got an incredibly sophisticated research protocol and it's all about anti-colonial research, about genuine First Nations leadership, using First Nations knowledges or privileging First Nations knowledges. So I you know, I often sort of half joke say, you know, we had a series of auditions, which we did.

Scotia: Well it's about trust building, isn't it? Particularly, as you say, there's such a cloud over this notion of research or extractive kind of ways of engaging with communities, First

Nations communities particularly. So you have to have that bridge of trust don't you, or an audition I love that.

Naomi: Yeah. You do. And I you know, I absolutely loved every step of it because it is that, you know, very being in that humble ally position, you know, in the deepest possible way. And I would call myself in that situation an insider ally. So First Nations-heritage researcher working alongside Arrernte people who are leading on that Country. Yeah. But the work that people have done there over decades, they've got an incredible infrastructure which also makes it actually possible for research teams like ours to work in accordance with its ethical guidelines and protocols around data sovereignty and research sovereignty. And, you know, not all communities can prioritise that when there's other, you know, things that need priority, and that's completely understandable. But in this particular case, this organisation has its own research and evaluation team and staff and they've got a governance committee. So we could let you know, put our proposals forward, discuss things, have things debated and get approval and be mentored and looked after too. I think that, you know, we were really, really cared for when we've done our work there, which is just an amazing feeling.

Scotia: Such a rich exchange isn't it, it's amazing. So what have your investigations revealed so far do you have, have you started to get a bit of a sense of where it's heading?

Naomi: Yes. So I won't talk in very minor you know, very minor specifics because we're still getting our data and findings approved, which is also a great thing to be doing, and that we're able to do that with local, Traditional custodians. But yeah, I mean, we've mapped our data in preliminary ways using existing cultural determinants of health models and musical practices in First Nations families and communities are lighting up every single domain of cultural health determinants. And and also, you know, on these models you often see around the outside of the cultural determinants, those political and social environmental determinants are acknowledged as being influential. So, you know, political and economic determinants and the interactions with music have been quite huge in our study. But I'd say that's, you know, that that's quite a preliminary outcome. We have just published an article on that in Health Promotion International if anyone's interested, but I think it'll be a bit different in each location we're working in. So for example, in Central Australia, a huge, you know, domain of health and wellbeing effects is social and emotional wellbeing. And I found it quite extraordinary the degree to which Arrernte families and individuals are self-managing their health and wellbeing with music, music listening in particular. And yeah, we're not in a position to share specific stories, as I said just yet, but it's been one of the major findings from that particular area so far. And then we also, you know, the activism and the human rights work and the caring for Country carries across all of our locations so far, but also really important work in families. So intergenerational transmission of knowledge, cohesiveness in families coping, you know, positive coping strategies and so on and collective, you know, community work. So sometimes that may be ceremony so Traditional music around sorry business, for example, or it might be, you know, just around celebration and, you know, mass events like, you know, taking family members and going off and seeing their favourite artist, Beyoncé or whoever it's going to be. I don't know who went to Harry Styles lately, but yeah, there's a lot of stories about, yeah, just taking those trips away from Country as well for the massive, you know, the big pinnacle peak bliss sort of experiences of music, which I think a lot of us have and enjoy as well. Yeah, I'd say at the moment in Central Australia, social emotional wellbeing is probably our biggest domain of activity and effect. Oh, can I just say we always try to get people to say bad things about music…

Scotia: And

Naomi: But it's very, you know, there are some striking examples. We don't want to have rose coloured glasses on. We want to have a critical take on the potential and the limitations of music as a determinant of health or something that can shape determinants of health. But yeah, overwhelmingly positive and protective functions.

Scotia: Something that comes up in a lot of the work that we do in the Creative Recovery Network and more broadly is the importance of that trauma-aware and trauma informed practice. So you're working within this space where opposition related collective trauma and racial trauma is a very big consideration. How are you approaching that within this research framework that you're doing? I know that you've worked with Judy Atkinson, a great driver of particularly trauma-informed practice within a cultural framework. Is that what's kind of guiding your process?

Naomi: Absolutely. Aunty Judy and Carlie Atkinson's work is just, I would say, really world leading in terms of merging the best of non-Indigenous knowledges with Indigenous cultural practices and ways of knowing and being and doing in relation to trauma and healing. But also outside of that, you know, I've worked in human services and social work context for a long time, so just the small things and the big things we can do to make spaces feel safe for everyone we're working with and for ourselves, I think permeate the way we're doing research in this project. We've been really overt about that, but also I think just having that open awareness to how people are, for example, self managing their own social emotional wellbeing using music, so how music is weaving in and out of the community's responses to shaping their own healing after major events and then just ongoing daily stressors. So when I was thinking about your network and the podcast series, you know, I started to think about some really significant community events that happened while I was in Mparntwe. And we were obviously on the periphery as visitors, but there working with an organisation who have, you know, family members involved in a lot of events. And it’s a cycle of, you know, of major traumatic events happening for a lot of families and the way people are navigating that, it's incredibly involved, incredible strength, incredible social, cultural strength and resilience and the way that First Nations music comes into what you might call those crisis times for the community to help with sorry business is just incredible. And the overlapping of contemporary music with traditional music practices and ceremony and the way people are caring for themselves and others. And Aunty Judy talks about, you know, we need to feel the feelings. We need to find our stories. We need to find out who we are and understand that over generations. Because I think in Australia as a whole, we need to find out why things are the way they are now. And part of that is this trauma work that Aunty Judy's led is finding our stories. Understanding that.

Scotia: Well there's something about acknowledging that deep grief. Trauma is about grieving and grieving in so many cultures is released through song, isn't it?

Naomi: Absolutely. And, you know, cultural mourning processes and the use of the physical voice, you know, as well as in a collective and on our own. And so there's a lot of weaving in and out between, as I said, cultural practices and then more personal contemporary individual practices of managing that grief and recovering and, you know, being able to go to work and and look after the family and do all the things we need to do as mums and dads and cousins. And yeah, so I think that, you know, sometimes I've done yarns in Mparntwe and people have given feedback, which is one of the incredible things about working with Children’s Ground we, we test, you know, we test run everything and

got feedback from local people and there's a lot of feedback around just the gentleness and you know, when people have had choice you know, robbed from them pervasively over generations, that trauma-informed approach will always emphasise giving people choice, control, agency and power over their own participation, involvement and their intellectual and cultural property, their stories.

Scotia: Well that's one of the cultural determinants isn't it, self-determination.

Naomi: It's a huge one. Yeah, and yeah, and in any culture, community or family, trauma is often associated with being overpowered, you know, in whatever way culturally, physically, emotionally, intellectually, economically. So yet in research, just don't do that, you know, and get in behind what people local people are doing anyway and and fuel your energy into what they're doing. And so that's what we've tried to do. But sometimes, you know, like even as a community music facilitator, when I first started to overtly use a trauma informed approach, it could feel quite clumsy because you've also got to guide and curate and lead an experience for a group of people and you don't want to be going "only if you want to". And there's got to be an element of holding that space confidently for people, but also making that safety accessible for all and co-created by all. So I think the cultural processes for doing that can be great for all participants, but particularly First Nations participants. So just, you know, taking the time to introduce ourselves properly, talking about protocols. And as one of my teachers in Antonia Burke talked about in Wi Al-li, what are you going to do when the protocols have been broken? That's even more important than setting the protocols. What are you going to do? What are we all going to do? What's our collective agreement? What are we going to do if you know, if it goes pear shaped?

Scotia: Well, that's the key framework of time, too, that Auntie Miriam Rose talks about. We don't have that context to be able to sit and work that out or respond when something happens, when something is broken.

Naomi: Yeah. And you know, when it's like, you know, triggers at 12 paces, like when someone goes off, you know, there's a highly emotional response or and it like this is the thing that feedback for researchers and anyone, community arts facilitators, anyone doing anything is not always going to come in a polite little package, you know, and, people's… all of our trauma informs every way that we react in these situations. And, you know, I've been in situations as a researcher where, you know, things have gotten elevated very quickly. It's very rare, but it has happened. And just to be able to step back and understand that what's happening may be, you know, a trauma-based reaction and then how we manage that and and move forward together can be really informed well by trauma informed processes or not, you know, it can it can sort of compound if people are reacting and reacting and reacting. I'm not sure that a lot of university processes are equipped to manage that, that intimacy of community work in this kind of research.

Scotia: Well it's interesting because I think it's also a challenge for the disaster management space, because it's not set up to be intimate in that same way. But there's more and more being asked of it in this same framework to trauma-informed context, but not necessarily capacity or knowledge to understand what that means in reality and I think that word intimacy is such a beautiful way of framing.

Naomi: Yeah. And I think Aunty Miriam Rose's, Dardirri, you know, deep inner listening, which is a cultural practice that she gifted to the nation in 1988 and which Aunty Judy and We Al-li, you know, is a core teaching that they share in their work around trauma integrated practice to just be able to sit still and listen to someone who's experienced, you

know, a profound crisis, you know, who's having all the physical effects of that, all of this social, you know, you know, the material effects of that, to be able to sit quietly and just deeply listen to that person is an incredible skill.

Naomi: So that ability to just sit and listen. But also we know that workers need that as well. You know, crisis response workers.

Scotia: Yeah, the care for care is such a big area. Um, and so, so, unexplored in a way.

Naomi: And then there's also, you know, other people that I work with like incredible arts practitioner and Aboriginal midwife Maryanne Wobcke and Maryanne sort of says to me yet and listening is, is so fundamental, but sometimes we need to go shush now. What you know, what you're talking about is just looping and recreating the current situation. I just want you to be quiet now and, and maybe move to a new space. So I found that quite extraordinary too. So sometimes the deep listening is not enough. You know, sometimes there has to be a more active…

Scotia: Intervention. Yeah. And that's the skill, isn't it? Working out. Yeah. To what and to what degree?

So on your Remedy Project website, you have a lot of really great resources, podcasts, videos about the project, and we'll link that in the show notes and encourage people to check that out. But what's the next step and where do you wish to take this work?

Naomi: Yeah, well, the next step is to really listen deeply to all of the yarns that we've been doing across the nation over the last two years and to come up with some new models of health determinants and approaches to health promotion practice and policy that acknowledge this intense, extreme, gorgeous range of the ways that music is interacting with health determinants in people's real life every day. So it'll be a very grassroots modelling and theorisation of the way that music works as a determinant of health in First Nations communities. I will be coming together with our international advisory group and all the Community Research Associates again to say, okay, you lot what now? What do we want to…what's the final what are the final offerings? There'll be more community based versions of our research outputs. So sharing that back, we've got budgets to do creative research outputs with the participating communities. So it could be some commissioned songs, it might be a mini doco. We don't know yet. It'll be what people ask us for. And then yeah, just lots and lots and lots of sharing. So we've got an incredible collection of yarns and we'll be editing those into podcasts as part of the Remedy Music Podcast series. And then, you know, some of the elders here at Griffith University have said, Naomi, I want this turned into courses and so on. So that's a whole other suite of things. But also early next year we'll be going to work at the University of New Mexico to work with First Nations musicians there and songwriters as part of a Fulbright Fellowship. And so we want to extend what we've learnt from the Remedy Project to some international collaborations as well. But really it's about handing it back. All data goes back to the communities for local decision making and anything.

Scotia: Because ultimately a key role of research is to look at systemic change, isn't it? And how do we take this and share these stories in a way that influences the political level really to determine where and how that kind of arm intersects with community needs? So how do you see that happening?

Naomi: Yeah, I think we've got a great opening at the moment in Australia in the arts health sector through the Creative Australia and the new cultural policy and also the work that Creative Australia or Australia Council has been leading around mental health. So what I would like to do is offer these new grassroots ground-up models of, you know, health determinants and health promotion to organisations like that and to start to work in partnerships with people around implementing those. So um…and they'll be prototype level. So it will be a lot of let's try it together and see what the outcomes may be by taking that more holistic, in this case, music-involved or music-inclusive approach to health and wellbeing promotion. So I think yeah, just using existing networks like the Arts Health Network Queensland, like our connections interstate and the fabulous opportunities particularly focussed on First Nations wellbeing and arts through Creative Australia will be fantastic avenues, but we also also will be working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies around health and wellbeing. So distributing all of our materials and seeking to apply those through those bodies, those existing peak bodies.

Scotia: So in addition to all this amazing research you're doing your musician yourself and a performer. What do you do to nourish that side of your work? Is that part of this practice as well?

Naomi: It is. And we also always offer, like a range of, we're very flexible in how we will actually do research with different locations. We always offer that we could, for example, do collaborative songwriting as a data collection mechanism and a co-interpretation of findings. So that has been a focus for my own musicality, I guess, and my singing and songwriting is capturing experiences and conversations in song and also trying to use my own voice in ways that accord with those trauma sensitive ways of working. For example, can my voice accompany, you know, with music help to be a grounding and make that connection to country and be offered, you know, as a resource, as part of healing and setting that scene? So I have to say that's some of the most fulfilling music I've done for a very long time and to be able to offer it with that spirit of service and get away from all the other stuff, you know, when you're a young musician and you're trying to sell, you know, yourself and your music for different aspirations. But yeah, to come back to more of a community role and just to, you know, to have Elders say, you are a songwoman, and that means you now have these responsibilities. And I see that within my research work. You know, I have responsibilities to share these stories through song. And it is a beautiful process. And to just fully recognise the, the spiritual role of that and the cultural place of inspiration and intuition and guidance from ancestors or however people want to conceive of it in the creative process, has been incredibly healing for me and it creates connections like they talk about in the theory back to my community, my culture, my Dad, my grandparents. So it's, it's an incredible personal journey as well because coming yeah you know they often talk about healing is coming back to ourselves and each other and standing firm on Country. And I have to say, when I'm in that mode, when I can sing like that, it does it feel incredibly healing in the way that, you know, that Elders talk about, that the pinnacle of healing is coming back to ourselves and standing firm on ground. And that, yeah, that's what it feels like to be able to create this kind of music.

Scotia: Well, what a beautiful place to finish. Thank you so much. Such a rich conversation and I really look forward to seeing and hearing the research outcomes. All the best.

Naomi: Thank you so much, Scotia, and all the best with your work. And yeah, I can't wait to to share what you're doing as well.

Scotia: Thanks for joining me for Creative Responders in Conversation and special thanks to Naomi for sharing her work and learnings. We'll link to the Remedy Project in our show notes if you'd like to follow the progress of that work.

If you'd like to know about more projects using arts-based methods to support and strengthen communities, we have a library of case studies on our brand new Creative Recovery Network website - you can find us at www.creative recovery.net.au.

That's also where you can find our latest news, research and all of our podcast episodes along with transcripts and resources related to each episode.

This podcast is produced by me and my Creative Recovery Network colleague, Jill Robson. Our sound engineer is Tiffany Dimmack and the Creative Responders theme is composed by Mikey Squire.

Thanks for listening.