

Walama List – A reflection

I started the Walama List process in February 2022 while I was remanded in custody at Shortland Correctional Centre. I didn't know much about this process but from what I did know, it was similar to '*koori court*' which had some success in Victoria.

I was transported to Silverwater's Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre the weekend before my court hearing. The smell of the place still lingers in my mind as the flashbacks begin. They were one of the longest three nights of my life.

The proceedings began on Monday, I was told that the following day I was to be released. Thank you Hon. Judge Dina Yehia for your judgement.

As we continued to meet monthly, I became more comfortable and able to share my strengths, shortcomings, vulnerabilities. I came to believe that they must really see me as fully human and not a number. I am no longer just inmate [REDACTED]. I have a name, an identity, a community and I have culture. One of the oldest continuing cultures in the world. I am Barkindji, I'm [REDACTED].

Allowing *blackfullas* to have self determination is key to addressing systemic problems in our communities such as over incarceration and placing us as the knowledge holders as to how we can improve our own lives is central to our ongoing development. Having the court to realise, accept and rule that we are the true experts over our own lives, recovery and rehabilitation is a positive move not only for the individual but also the wider community. In doing so, we are creating a brighter future for society as a whole and in turn, allowing holistic healing for the individual. I think this is evident given I haven't reoffended during this process and I have no immediate or future desires to.

The Walama List provides culturally appropriate and positive elements to proceedings that are lacking in mainstream court. It allows me to sit, listen and tell my story in a culturally appropriate way.

I think all of this can be attributed to my legal team, the prosecution, my support networks and the Elders and judges, particularly Hon. Judge Hunt.

Every time I came to court after using substances or breaching my order, I wasn't looked down upon but rather lifted up and reminded of my worth. Something I

can easily see in others but hardly for myself. In these small acts of kindnesses, it humanised the court and it humanised me. Very rarely do you find in a traditional court setting such support from all sides of the bar table and the bench.

I'm no longer allowing my anger to become destructive, I'm able now to use it as a tool to drive advocacy.

Jailing a human being for crimes that they have committed and their criminogenic risk factors ought to be the very last option. By investing in processes like these, provides all of us with a vision of hope. It allows us to see the beauty were all making here in a very real way. We're allowing to see the flowers grow from the concrete floors. Allowing Indigenous people to be seen, heard and appreciated. Allowing us to be the authors of our own lives, narrators of our own stories and changing the needed chapters to move forward with our futures.