

John:

0:11

A few years ago, during COVID in 2020, I was sitting in the back of a Tafe in Sydney, completely by diploma in a building and construction. The main reason I was there was to understand commercial building and how it might translate into the work I'm doing at the moment.

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Growing up as a young child, my father built the home that we lived in. He did this because he needed to build a home; we didn't have anywhere else to live. So he built a house, he wasn't a builder, he was a very resourceful man. He didn't complete high school, but he knew that he had a deep need to provide shelter for our family.

1:00

Many Aboriginal families around Australia have the same need; they don't have the opportunity to build a home. So that is the challenge that we have to meet in the future.

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The idea that someone might live without shelter—being homeless or living in a car—is abhorrent to most of us. However, it's omnipresent in society today. What we want to do at Swinburne is develop the types of approaches that can rectify this in the future.

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My idea is to establish what I call an Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication Center. We know at the moment that Indigenous housing is at an all-time low. The Productivity Commission report earlier this year shows that we haven't made a dent in Indigenous housing. We need to move beyond that.

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An Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication Center would be the way that we can address that in the future.

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So what does an Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication look like? This would be a place at Swinburne where we bring together the technology and manufacturing practices that we have here, just around the corner of this building, to solve some of the particular problems that now beset us in housing.

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We'll also look at the types of materials that we could use in building. How can we build better houses in the future that are sustainable, durable, and responsive to the environmental conditions where people live?

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An Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication would be a living center, a place where researchers, educators, architects, engineers, and people interested in making an improvement in Indigenous housing could meet and work and work towards solutions in indigenous housing.

3:02

That living center, would be a place which would generate new ideas about building, blending technology with materials, and also looking at the resources where Indigenous people now live. It might be that technology is only part of the answer, but we need to be able to build houses in communities which respond to local needs.

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Part of that Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication Center might be working from the ground up, right from the get-go, looking at what are the needs in the community, what are the things that they respond to, what are the housing conditions that they live in from year to year.

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We know that the sort of housing that people want differ from the East Coast of Australia to Central Australia. We also know from the Productivity Commission that building a house away from the major centers is more expensive.

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It's harder to get materials there, and it is not always built to a standard which provides sustainability and durability over time. So our goal in the future is to bring together designers, architects, engineers, and builders to remedy that situation.

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Swinburne is a dual-sector university, and we're able to draw on expertise from a whole range of disciplines to make that happen in the future.

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Why does this matter? Why should we bother to go down this particular path? There are three reasons why we need to go down this path.

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One is that, over the last 20 or 30 years, the housing crisis has disproportionately impacted Indigenous communities around Australia. There are barriers to housing in most communities, not least where people are located.

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But also, getting builders and resources to those communities is often compromised.

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So what can we do? With technology, we can solve some of those problems. With technology and manufacturing, we can work in communities at a rate that's different from what it is at the moment.

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Building a house at the moment takes a considerable amount of time. What we want to do is build houses quicker, more sustainably, and more durably into the future.

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Australia has, in the past, had a maker mentality; people would build their own homes. We've lost that over time in favor of commercial building. What we need to do is turn our backs on that and look to the future.

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Organizations such as Swinburne play a vital role in creating that new dynamic.

6:00

Some time ago, when I was thinking about this new dimension to building, someone said to me, "Why do you want to do this? Why is this important?"

6:02

I was reflecting on my father and him building our house and the type of resilience that brought out in him and us as kids, because we all had to do the laboring of course, which taught us more about building.

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But also to because, this is a rich country; this is a country that deserves better for our Indigenous families and communities around Australia. If we look at this from the point of view that we can do better, then my conclusion to this is, that we can.

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By establishing an Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication Center, we can make improvements to housing one home at a time. We can use technology to bring about the social change we want to see in this country.

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I want to thank that person for asking me that question about why we wanted to pursue this idea of Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication. I'd like to thank them for helping me think about what the answer might be.

7:01

So, Like I said, we want to improve Indigenous housing one home at a time. A home is more than four walls and a roof; it's a home and its where communities and families' trajectories into life start.

7:19

The Indigenous Building Co-Fabrication can be part of that new trajectory. Thank you.