DARREN BRITTEN: Welcome, everybody, and thank you for joining us today. My name is Darren Britten and I am the National Assistive Technology Officer with the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, that is ADCET for short. I'm a white male in my mid-50s. I'd like to say middle aged, and think I'll live to 110, which would be lovely. I have greying blond hair and a beard which is much more white than blond anymore, and I'm wearing a collared checked shirt and blue rimmed glasses I'm wearing today.

Just to let you know today's webinar is being live captioned, and to activate those captions you can select the cc button in the tool bar that's located in either the top or bottom of your Zoom screen. We also have captions available via a browser if you would prefer to follow along which will be added to the chat box a link will be added to the chat box for you to select that.

ADCET is hosted on Lutruwita, which is Tasmanian Aboriginal land, and in the spirit of reconciliation ADCET respectfully acknowledges the Lutruwita nations and also recognises the Aboriginal history and culture of the land and I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make Elder status. I'd also like to acknowledge all other countries and lands from participants in this webinar and acknowledge their Elders and ancestors and their legacy to us, and also any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are joining this webinar today.

Today's webinar, BlakAbility, higher education's role in improving life outcomes for Indigenous people living with disability, is presented by Sheelagh Daniels Mayes who will explore the intersection of Indigenous Australians and disability, highlighting systemic inequalities in higher education and advocating for culturally safe, disability confident approaches to drive transformational change.

Now, before we begin just a couple of short housekeeping details. This webinar is being live captioned by Sharon from Bradley Reporting thank you, Sharon and is being recorded. This recording will be made available on ADCET in the coming days and we'll notify all participants of that.

If you have any technical difficulties please email admin@adcet.edu.au. The presentation today will run for around 45 to 50 minutes or so, and then at the end we'll allow some time for questions. Throughout the presentation feel free to use the chat box to chat with us and each other, but please remember to choose everyone so that everyone can read what you have to say. If you'd like to share a reaction during this presentation, please use the react button in the Zoom tool bar and this will appear on the screen so that others can see that you're providing some feedback as Sheelagh presents her information today. Sheelagh is happy to answer questions at the end of the presentation, and if you have a question you would like asked, please use the Q&A box rather than the chat box. With all of that out of the way, please welcome Sheelagh as we look at higher education's role in improving life outcomes for Indigenous people living with disability. Thank you and over to you, Sheelagh.

SHEELAGH DANIELS-MAYES: Hello, everybody. So the reasons that are obvious to us, that title is a very long title. So when we put that into the Australian Research Council, it was necessary, but we now refer to this research framework methodology approach, whatever way we're doing it, as BlakAbility, and I'll explain a little bit about BlakAbility today.

Before I get started though, and I've shortened if we go to the acknowledgment of country, Darren is going to operate the slides so I don't have to be multi handed. I've just slightly shortened this for today to save us a little bit of time. But I'd like to pay my respects to our Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledging the countries that we are all coming from today on unceded lands. As we come together today, I would like for us to reflect on disability, and acknowledge the holistic perspectives that Indigenous cultures bring to our understandings of ability, disability and inclusion.

I acknowledge, too, everyone in the webinar who is coming to us from different parts of this great nation that we now call Australia, and I recognise the inherent value and the unique contributions of everyone, no matter who you are or where you're from.

We're going to have the slides made available to you. There are far too many slides for us to get through today, just to let you know, but I find that if I take one slide out, it's normally the one that we need. I've asked Darren to drive the slides for me today because I've got my hands on three different keyboards doing Braille readouts and going between slides and Word and all sorts of things happening in the background. And we will have time for questions at the end, because I've asked Darren to speed me up if I'm getting behind. So we will continue on to the next slide.

So this is what we call getting my feathers on, and it's a reference to me doing cultural business as an Aboriginal woman. So I'm from the Gomeroi you may have heard it pronounced also as Kamilaroi people in the northwest of NSW. I'm descended down through my mother, who was a Gomeroi woman. We're freshwater and that that's interesting. I'll explain what's going on in a second. New technology. The actual river actually sort of informs my knowledge, my ways of being in the world. It's about, we think, for example, about upriver thinking. So whatever we do down river or upriver, it impacts on one another. So if you dam a river uphill, upriver, then the water is not going to flow. So a lot of the methodology that I do is about unblocking rivers, so to speak, metaphorically speaking.

I'm also low vision. You can see an image here of my guide dog, Topaz, who is my second girl, who is now nearly seven years old and has been dragging me around for the last five years, so to speak. The other three, and I'm not going to go into these in any great depth here, are my three feathered friends down the bottom. But just quickly to say that these are my cultural totems. They all have cultural responsibilities. Crow, for example, we hear about a murder of crows, but there's also a storytelling of crows. So I'm a storyteller, and I have an obligation to tell story, particularly for those who have been silenced or marginalised or don't have the privilege of being able to tell their story. But crow is also a trickster. So crow is a troublemaker. So my responsibility as an Aboriginal person is also to call out things that are racist, sexist, ableist, whatever, and do that truthtelling work and be loud and proud about that. It's important to know, too, that I didn't grow up knowing about my Aboriginality. For a lot of reasons that I'm not going to go into today, I didn't find out until my early 20s. But I was institutionalised at the age of nine as a handicapped mildly retarded multi handicapped child at the Royal NSW Institute for Deaf and Blind Children. All of that informs what we're now doing and researching as well. So I'm living BlakAbility, quite literally.

But if we go to the next slide, this is an image of my mum who was born, we believe, somewhere around about 1942, 1943. She passed away in 1970, so it's the pretty usual story, unfortunately, of a short lifespan. But why I bring mum into everything that I do is just to remind me that mum being born as she was in that era, she didn't ever get to go to school because she was Aboriginal. I am, therefore, the first in my family I have four brothers and sisters but I'm the first in the family to not only finish school but go on to university and certainly the first to work in a university. This is really important for us to remember, that a lot of our Indigenous students, and in turn a lot of our disabled students, are actually first in family and possibly the only one in family, and that in itself can cause all sorts of tensions within families. So that can be going on in the background when you're making those life choices to go to university or even finish school.

So we go to the next slide. I'm going to briefly introduce the BlakAbility team. So the BlakAbility team consists mostly of Aaron, who is our Director of Indigenous Knowledge Institute at Melbourne University; Sharon Kerr who we share with University of Sydney She's my Senior Research Associate; Imogen, who is my Research Assistant, who tries to do all the digital things that my eyesight doesn't allow me to do. We've also got Aunty Roz on here as well and a couple of our awesome guide dogs. And we've got Anthea who is a Musicologist who works with us and a former journalist on the research as well.

So this doesn't include our governance group, which is Aboriginal and disability led who actually guide everything that we do in this research. I'll quickly explain we removed the letter C from the spelling of "black". It's a very common thing to do these days, but Destiny Deacon started this movement a few years ago. In BlakAbility we remove the C because it stands for colonisation, civilisation, Christianisation, colour, capitalism and, as someone said to me last week, Captain Cook. So we also remove him from the narrative as well.

So if we go to the next slide, we'll start to understand what the problem is. For Australia, generally speaking we know that roughly 20% of the population has a disability, which can be temporary or permanent. It can be sensory, it can be mobility, physical. It can be age related. So a disability that's acquired later in age. It can be biological. It can be genetics. It can be an accident or an injury that happens in our lifetimes.

So this is sort of me teaching you what you already know but if we go on yep, we're on to the next slide for the next lot of statistics. So we don't have fantastic statistics around the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live with disability, but what we do know from some of the research and through some sort of guess work, or educated guess work, is we know roughly 45% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people live with a disability. So it's twice as likely as non-Aboriginal Australian people. And we also include within that disability category people who have a chronic illness that is disabling. So it's very important to understand that this is what we're talking about is we're not just talking about disability as western models would dictate; we're talking about what chronic illness is doing. That brings us a bigger pool of people as well, but we're learning this is very, very necessary to be able to do that in cultural ways.

So let's keep moving. We'll go through. So some of the research done by colleagues such as Scott Avery and John Gilroy, for example, telling us that Aboriginal people with disabilities are some of the most disadvantaged in Australia, if not the most disadvantaged. They're also the most isolated, the most socially, economically disadvantaged groups of Australian people. But it's still not an explicit category, for example, within the Closing the Gap targets. So it's still not on the radar in a lot of ways, but I'm starting to see in the last few weeks that this is starting to change, which is a really, really exciting area to be in as we keep pushing through.

We'll go to the next slide. Just a reminder that these are the numbers. Non-Aboriginal people with disability are around about twice as likely well, Aboriginal people are twice as likely, or a little bit more, to have a disability or be living with a chronic disability through illness, such as myself. I have two or three diagnosed disabilities. Most people know about my low vision, but there are others. And I also live with around about 14 or 15, I think at the last count, chronic health conditions. So that needs to be managed in my everyday as well.

So we'll go to the next slide. We've got a little extra up there. So what we're saying with that little extra that flashed up there is what we want people to remember when we're talking about BlakAbility is that every single statistic that we're talking about, every number, is a human being. We often forget that when we talk about statistics. It's a human being. They've got families. They've got communities. They have stories and these are the stories we're trying to get to within BlakAbility for the purpose of educating and changing systems within, for example, higher education.

If we go to the next slide. I'll leave that question coming through. So one of the biggest problems we find within this and one of the reasons why we don't have really good statistics, for example, or really good systems to work with Aboriginal people with disability is because we're still really dealing with deficit discourses, or those discourses, those narratives that think about Aboriginal people, for example, as being lacking, let alone then having a disability to say that you're a problem that needs to be fixed.

So these deficit discourses more often than not fit people who don't fit the social norm, the idealised perfect human being, whoever that might be. I'm not quite sure who that is but we seem to be trying to attain something, and if you're not fitting those standards, then you're certainly not part of the centre, the privileged area, so to speak. So it can come out through thought, it can come out through language, it can come out through daily practice. If we go to the next slide, what I've done here is just gone through and found a whole lot of quotes within scholarship, and just got a bit of a gathering here of quotes about deficit when you're Indigenous and deficit when you have a disability. So it's just trying to separate those out. But generally speaking when I've got dozens of these. So in short, they're thinking about absence or lack, even Closing the Gap tells us about lack because we're trying to catch up, even though disability is not part of that, generally overall all Aboriginal people are part of that Closing the Gap narrative that has its own problems, let's say.

So what we've got to remember, higher education that we're all engaged in, in one way or another, is very much complicit in this. We perpetuate deficit discourses in research, in policies, in practice. It's getting better, absolutely, but we've still got to remember things like it's only been recently that we've started to see research being done by people with a disability rather than by being done on people with a disability.

Same with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coming through with, they’re a little bit further ahead with disability, coming through with their own codes of ethics and research methodologies and so forth. But we've also got to remember that with regards to Aboriginal people, the first Aboriginal person, it was a woman, to graduate from university was in 1957. So it's not that long ago, going back to what I was saying about my mother. It's really within the last one or two generations that we're starting to see that change.

So we're getting better but we've got a long way to go, as I keep on saying. I feel like I need to write a song. So the next one I'm just going to jump through fairly quickly. I'm going to leave you to have a look at it but I'm also going to say that most of you will be familiar with these different models of disability. This again is a project of ours to gather up all these definitions. So we've got the usual ones of like the charity model, the religious model of disability. We've also got the medical model of disability, and universities are pretty dependent on the medical model. We ask our students with disability to have a diagnosis, for example. University of Melbourne is beginning to shift away from relying solely on the medical model of diagnosis with students and looking at a combination of human rights, social justice rights, alongside the medical model. So that's going to be very new within our university in the next 12 months. But it opens up more possibilities for students to get the adjustments that they actually need.

The other thing with models, you'll see that there's now this economic model of disability. So and when we went for our ARC research grant, the feedback we received was that we needed an economist on our research grant. So there's a very big move into how much is this costing us, and there's a lot of reasons behind it that I won't delve into today. But in the last week we've found about another nine models of disability that I haven't put here yet. I've got to read through the stuff to see what they're actually saying. They're probably similar but they're different wordings but there are endless definitions of disability out there.

If we go to the next slide. This is my poor research assistant Imogen. It was her trying to put into an image what was going on in my brain. I'll explain colonial load and disload in a moment. What we're really seeing in the early interviews of staff and students who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander who work or study at Australian universities is this and I knew this before we got the interviews going but we are seeing this story of if you're Aboriginal and you're a student, then you go to Aboriginal student services. If you have a disability, you go to disability services, and you walk between the two. So you're having to probably provide documentation for both services. You're probably having to tell your story multiple times to different people. And then you're expected to be enthusiastic, bright eyed, and go away and do your studies and do your assignments.

When you're a staff member it gets even more complicated. We have services that identify for Aboriginal staff but not services available for Aboriginal staff who have a disability. So I can get support and services as an Aboriginal academic, but I still struggle I'm getting better at finding who needs to do a service such as technology, or alternate formatting, or getting a library resource. Who do I go to as a staff member? It's an extreme sport, really, now that I think about it.

So these footprints that we've got here are just to show you, in a way, that staff and students who fit these categories of Aboriginality and disability, we're exhausted. We're going backwards and forwards, and quite often we're being left on our own to discover what support services are there, what policies are there, what strategies are there. So this is what we're trying to figure out how to make this an easier process. And we haven't got all the answers yet, but we're getting closer to fathoming a few things that we need to be looking at and we'll be experimenting with some of this at University of Melbourne and Sydney University to begin with.

So if we go to the next slide, this is something that I've put together coming from the first round of interviews with research participants but also my own lived experience and the lived experience of the governance group. Colonial load, which you saw in the previous slide, is what a lot of people might remember or know as what we were calling cultural load. We now call it colonial load. Culture is not the problem. Aboriginal culture is our protective factor. It's our strength. Going back to our communities, that's not a problem. But the ongoing impact of colonisation certainly is the problem. So, therefore, that's shifting into being colonial load.

I also have disload there. And disload is my invention. It's all the work that you do as a disabled person, whether you're staff or students, that a lot of people don't see as happening. And quite often you're doing all of this extra invisible work without anyone knowing it's happening. And not only are you navigating the higher education system if you have a disability, I feel like I've got a full-time job just managing all of my medical appointments. And then, again, you're still expected to do your studies, to do your work, and work your way through that. So these are just some of the issues that are coming up of the extra work, the invisible labour that Aboriginal people with disability are doing in higher education. Okay. We'll go to the next slide.

So this brings us into this intersectionality idea, and I've got a quote here from a colleague in Canada that I work with sometimes on intersectionality. She works mostly within policy analysis, but we're also taking a lot of her stuff into all other parts of our work to do with service delivery, deficit discourse disruption, if you want to put all the Ds. So how do we get people to change their attitudes about Aboriginal people, disabled people and Aboriginal people with disability. We've sort of taken that idea of intersectionality from there. We've pulled out some of the key terms of users and put it into a Venn diagram. So while BlakAbility is primarily highlighting Aboriginality and disability, we're not forgetting the impact of gender. We're not forgetting the impact of religion, age. That's all coming into it as well. But it would be a very long word if we had to include all of that into the title of the framework.

So what we also have to remember is not just intersectionality of those equity categories or those elements of being a human being, it's also about the intersection of the systems and structures that either work for or work against us.

The other thing that I just really it really is a fine line to actually walk sometimes because some people are sort of saying, "Well, I feel sorry for Aboriginal people with a disability." I've had people in public, random strangers talk to me, because obviously I can't see because I have a guide dog, and we can go into this domain of, "What do you do for work?" I'll say, "I'm an Associate Professor in Indigenous studies." They go, "Oh, are you Aboriginal?" I'll go, "Yes." They'll go, "As if you didn't have enough problems."

So we can go into this very deficit thinking very fast, but what we have to remember, too, like our acknowledgment of country, is that there's power, there's privilege and there's oppression, and each and every one of us sort of shifts between these intersecting things. So I know, for example, that I have privilege and responsibility having a job in higher education that is asking some tough questions of universities and what they can do better. And what are they also doing well. So it's always this balancing act between those two sides of a coin, never getting sucked into all of the negative. Go find the positive. There are so many amazing people that we've been interviewing for BlakAbility, from first year students, right through to Pro Vice Chancellors at our universities. So there's no limits, other than the barriers that are put in our way or the exhaustion that we feel by having to traverse the university, so to speak.

So there's a lot happening also from the BlakAbility team using intersectionality. What we've pulled out, and we're in the middle of right now, is we've gone across all 39 universities, we've pulled out all of the disability strategies, although we've found seven universities that don't have one yet, and we've found there's Aboriginal strategies or there's Reconciliation Action Plans, and we're going through and analysing all of these to see how they could actually talk with one another so that we can do better service delivery. So if you've got a student sitting in front of you who is Aboriginal, has a disability, we have processes put in place, is what we're aiming for, to say to this person, "Instead of you having to tell your story twice, three, four times, instead of you having to go to two, three, four different services, we can do it all in one place."

Now, that might be an explicit person, or it might be about training up all of our student equity service staff. We're not sure yet. We're still waiting for that data to come through. But it certainly seems that that would be the case, just so that everybody is on the same page.

It's a big puzzle, as you can hear. There's a lot involved in this. And thankfully the research is for five years because it will take us a while to sort this through.

If we can go to the next slide, this is just me pulling out some quotes around intersectionality at work. So if we start to think about our students and our staff in a holistic way, so they are a human being, they are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, they have a disability. The disability might be, like in my case, low vision. They might be a Braille user, like I am. They might be a Jaws screen reader, like I am. What's the whole story of that person? And what can I connect that person in with? And what systems do our universities and higher education institutions need to be able to progress that person through?

I keep on pushing at meetings for what I call a concierge service, where a student or a staff member rocking up whatever need can actually go to one place and say, this is what I need, and that concierge, like a fancy hotel, can say, "Yes, I know. I can get you tickets to that event, or I can get you a taxi there", or whatever it is. But if you think about it in a concierge service type mechanism I've stolen that idea from private industry who are doing this if we have a concierge idea, then we've not got those footprints going all over the campus. We actually start to increase the numbers of students who are actually staying in, graduating, going on to post graduate work, going on to apprenticeships, whatever they're wanting to do, going on to be an academic, going through a career pathway, being mentored whatever is there. I mean, I've been at university, in one way or another, since 1985, and I feel still that a lot of what I've achieved at university has been down to sheer luck in a lot of cases, luck of finding the right people, or luck of being able to get that piece of technology that I've needed. It doesn't feel like it's been very deliberate along the way, and that's something that we're finding a lot of people are talking about. "I accidentally found out about so and so, or I accidentally found out that I can get technology."

So we want to stop those accidental findings and we're going to need to be working with universities to be able to pick up on these things and find systems that are going to work for the university but also for the students and staff who are impacted.

So if we go to the next slide, what I find interesting is this triangle was given to me, gifted to me by Aunty Nangala who was in my PhD research and I handed my PhD in in 2016. Aunty Nangala gave me this in about 2014 and it's only a representation. Some people get upset when they see this but it's only one representation of Aboriginal culture. I've got about 20 different ones. But the point of putting it down on paper like this, as was explained to me by Aunty Nangala, is to show that within Aboriginal culture, everything is connected. There's not one thing there just sitting on its own. So you've got the physical world, the spiritual world, the human world. They all work together. And if you think back to that slide of getting my feathers on, I'm connected to river and I'm connected to those three birds, the Willie Wagtail, kookaburra and crow. I'm very much connected to my mum. And mum is always with me, wherever I travel, to remind me that I stand here on the shoulders of giants who went before. There's also a lot who will go ahead of me and need to go ahead of me to do this work, and that goes to the core of Aboriginal culture as we can see here. Remembering always, and this goes to the core of BlakAbility, that everything is connected. And one of the things that we find when we're talking with people at university, they feel really isolated. Okay. So we've got to find ways that we can get past this isolation and there's a whole variety of things that are happening that I'm happy to share as we go forward. Darren, how long have we got to go? Just

DARREN: Probably got another 10, 15 minutes. We'll be fine. Yeah.

SHEELAGH: Okay. So we'll go to the next slide. And this is the last slide. Beyond this, there's some further readings. But what's interesting here because I didn't include this in the models of disability for a very deliberate reason is that the cultural understanding or the cultural model of disability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is polar opposites to any of the models that I showed you before. So social rights, not social human rights model, possibly getting a bit closer to the cultural model but it really doesn't stack up. So what's interesting with Scott Avery's work, for example, is that we know that across the 500 language groups across this continent, there's not one single word in any of the language groups for disability. Not one single one. It doesn't mean that disability didn't happen. It doesn't mean that it doesn't still happen, as we saw in the statistics before. What we find, though what we do know is that Aboriginal communities, we use terms or phrases that are very descriptive for mostly physical disabilities. So I know someone who is called Wobbly Arms, for example. So she has Parkinson's disease. I'm known in Aboriginal communities up north as Broke Eyes. Now, this is not derogatory. This is not deficit. This is purely and simply stating a truth. My eyes are broke. Aunty is wonky because she's got Parkinson's disease. What it allows us to do is to go and find that person really fast, or it tells us that person is going to need a little bit more of assistance. So if I'm teaching school in Maningrida in Arnhem Land, which I've done, the kids knew me as "broke eyes", and they would come to the motel and they would walk me to school. They would make sure that I had a cup of tea. So they're putting in the caring role because they know that's the extra that I need to be able to do my job completely. So there's a connection made, that relationality is a very big part of that cultural understanding of disability.

So if someone within Aboriginal communities has something that is making them not able to perform to the thousand per cent of humanity that we seem to expect these days, we come together. And if we think for example, some of you will know about Dr G, Dr Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, who has now passed. But Geoffrey was an amazing Yolngu man. Totally blind. An amazing musician, guitarist. But Geoffrey never learnt Braille. He never learnt Jaws. He did not use a white cane for mobility or a guide dog. And yet Geoffrey went to London and sang for the now passed Queen, because the community comes onboard and says what does this person need to be able to perform at their absolute best? And that's what we need to be looking at with regards to universities. What does this person in front of me need for them to be able to do their best.

So if we look at the last slide here. So I put this here as power because at the centre of all of this is power. I've written about this before I even got into doing disability scholarship. But if we look at this idea of power, can we have this power over people? We've all experienced it, probably. We've even possibly done it. But It is power with people or the collective power. What can we do as a mass and we see a lot of strikes these days what can we do as a mass to actually evoke change. So what we say to you within the higher education sector is what would need changing within the services that you're providing to enable Aboriginal people with a disability to actually get the services that they and the support that they need. And part of that mystery also is that we've got to remember that some Aboriginal people who look like me, I didn't describe myself at the beginning for reasons, I don't look like the stereotypical Aboriginal person. I am fair skinned. I have short hair. I think it's red at the moment. I have brown eyes, I think, or green, I'm not sure. But I don't look like what I'm told an Aboriginal person is supposed to look like with dark skin, and so forth. So you're never quite sure if you have an Aboriginal person sitting in front of you, and they may not feel comfortable or confident or safe enough to tell you. A person with a disability, we don't always know that they have a disability or a chronic illness, and they may not feel safe or confident to tell you. So the same story runs through twice.

How we get past that is basically building relationships with that person and building relationships is key. It's about telling each other who we are. That's the power that we have as individuals, but also then we need to say, okay, how can I use that power collectively? I mean, I'll be unashamedly here, Darren, I will say if you are a diversity inclusion or equity person/leader within our universities, reach out because we're going to be interviewing our what we call DIAL people in the next round of interviews in the second half of this year. If you want to participate in that, please just let us know about that.

But, Darren, I think we can open up to questions. We got through the slides.

DARREN: Excellent. You got through the slides. Look, we've got a good 20 minutes. This will be nice. Look, I've got a couple of questions to start with. I just apologise my camera is not turning on. There we go.

SHEELAGH: There you go.

DARREN: Thank you, Sheelagh. Look, just quickly, everybody, just join me in thanking Sheelagh for the presentation there.

Look, one thing that really struck me, and it's something that's been on my mind for a while, and it's certainly the concierge idea. That single point of contact, the single point of being able to connect you across the multiple services. But I'm just wondering as well from your research, et cetera, and from probably a data point of view, we don't do a very good job of not only do people have to report to different areas and give their information and their private information in a lot of cases, personal information multiple times, but we don't do a very good job of collecting where there's barriers either, because it's given in different ways to different areas. So we don't get a whole of institution set of data of where there's barriers being experienced, not only by students but also by staff, as you said.

So would you see really digging into your brain here; you gave us an insight how concierges or a single point of contact can also help capture where we're having those barriers at a whole different range of intersectionality that's happening as well?

SHEELAGH: Look, the concierge service, as I said before, I stole from private industry. And I stole it from a banking magnate who do have a concierge service for all of these sorts of things. Okay. I can't name them. I'm not allowed to. But it was one of the best things that I've seen. So this concierge service was two or three people within that organisation, within that bank, who you could email or go to and say, "This is my problem that I'm having", and they would actually not only take record of what the problem was, they would then work through the solution, but then they kept the data of those things happening.

So when I visited them about a year or so ago, they said, look, one of the biggest problems that they the biggest complaints that they were receiving was lighting. Okay. And it kept on coming up. So they have the data that lighting, overhead lighting, was a big issue. And I agree because it gives me migraines. So lighting was a big issue. So then they did some research with the colleagues within that bank and found some solutions. So what they now have on their open office design is hot desks, which don't always work for people with disability, but they've got other opportunities there, but you could go to different sections of the floor that have different lighting. You could have lighting at the desk, lighting overhead, dimmers, all sorts of things available.

The complaint of lighting has now disappeared from all of their data. So therefore, we start to get the complaints at a single point. We get the data, we find the solution, we implement the solutions and they track that through. And that's not what we're doing. You know, as you were saying, we have bits everywhere. I know who to go to, to get a hand railing fixed. I know who to go to, to get the elevator fixed. It's a different person. I know who to go to, to get my IT fixed, and it's a different person. But no one is actually talking with each other.

So one of the things that we're trying to think about within, say, University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne where I am, is to think about how do we collect these things and who and why. So we've got to look at the technology behind this. So there's a lot to get done. This wouldn't only benefit people with a disability or Aboriginal people with a disability, this would benefit all of us. And we've got to start remembering that it's not just for the person with a disability.

DARREN: Yep. Absolutely. Look, we do a lot of talk about operating in silos at our institutions. Lots of silos, lots of money that causes those silos as well, and how we need to do better at communicating across those silos, et cetera, as well. I love the idea of a concierge service. I'm going to steal it from you as well.

SHEELAGH: Please do. Get the momentum going.

DARREN: I'm sure many people will be doing. Thank you for that. Look, we've got a couple of questions that have come through directly and a couple in the Q&A. I might just start, whilst touching on that, what can uni disability support services better do to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? And what are some practical steps they could do to improve cultural safety for those students?

SHEELAGH: How long has it been since you've gone and had a cup of tea with your Aboriginal support services? That would be my very first question. Because quite often what I find is you get the disability support services over here and you get the Aboriginal support services in a different part of the campus, and never the two have talked. So when was the last time that you actually invited each other to your staff meetings or your community network days? That would be number one, in my book, to start changing that practice. Because what happens then and we've done it recently at Melbourne Uni what happens then is we find out who does what job. So that if we've got a student sitting in front of us who needs a particular person within the Aboriginal services, we know exactly who that is. Okay.

And I don't know the outcome of this, but we just did this really crazy thing at Melbourne University and I wasn't even part of it. It was fantastic. They actually moved the Aboriginal Student Services right over to where the disability services are in the Student Hub, rather than it being on the other side of campus. So even the location of services, are they actually within working distance of each other, because what that allows us to do is to say to a student, if a student is coming to you in disability support and they let you know they're Aboriginal, you can say to them, "Have you been to the Aboriginal Student Support Services?" "No, I haven't." "Would you like me to walk you over there?" And you can have that. That's that relationship building because now it's sort of like going with someone, rather than sending them to because it's a 15-minute walk one way. So the geographical location stuff can be huge but also that having regular meetings together, talking with one another about the services that you're providing so that you can work with your students and say this is what's available, what do you want? So there's tutoring services, there's technology services, how does that all work together?

So they're some practical things to start thinking about is actually getting to know each other's team, actually getting to know each other's services, getting to know each other's policies. I'm very strong in making sure that students and staff pretty much learn by heart their Disability Inclusion Action Plans and Aboriginal strategies so that when their services are not being met, they can actually recite it, because I've found that that's what I've had to do. You're not meeting this criteria within that Disability Action Plan. And I mean it's a bit shocking that we've got seven universities and I'm not going to name and shame but we've got seven universities who we can't find a current Disability Action Plan for.

DARREN: Yeah. Quite shocking. Sorry. I'm sitting in disbelief right now.

SHEELAGH: Yeah.

DARREN: I think you've shocked me and when you said that during your presentation I thought, really? Can there be that many? I thought one or two, but yeah that some of them are very out of date.

SHEELAGH: As of last week. But also the other interesting thing, and this is what we're doing, which is fairly unique, we aren't doing an accessibility check on all the disability and indigenous strategies to see if I can actually read them. And in 60 to 70% of cases, I can't. And they are concerning me in the work that I do and I can't read the documents that are impacting my life, which means other people who these strategies impact on, it's also impacting on their lives. We can't read them. How do we advocate, how do we change things if we can't actually read what the policies that are governing us?

DARREN: I wonder how many of those are written from a risk perspective to start with, rather than the inclusive perspective. Let's make this a conversational policy that we can relate to and get some understanding from. We'll be on that for another whole webinar, so I'll move one. Look, Juliette has a question here around are there resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to help them navigate, how to ask for support and what's possible to actually ask for?

SHEELAGH: No. We don't yet have anything that allows people to navigate and this is something we'll start helping universities develop. This year in O week was the first time we actually, on a disability front, but it wasn't just that in the end, we actually had orientation sessions for peer groups, such as low vision or blind, hard of hearing/deaf and ADHD. So we had three groups who were able to be peer for each other. Anything from first year students, right through to post graduate students, were now networking together, and it's actually taking off on its own. So they're having lunch and they're finding solutions to problems, or being able to advocate together for things to change. So those sorts of ground things need to be happening, but they need to be kicked off by those who are actually in the university itself. So students can't do it themselves. They need the support of other people.

DARREN: Yep. I suppose that leads to another question, in a way, and reflecting, I suppose, on your experience, not only as a student but as a staff member, the biggest barriers you had as a student and as a staff member. Are you seeing some of these same barriers, even now, for students?

SHEELAGH: Yes. So we still have, for example, as a low vision person, problems or time lags in getting access to digital material. Not being able to use websites, not being able to use libraries, not being able to get stuff that is accessible to read. So I hate PDFs. I could do a whole webinar on "PDFs suck", because PDFs are just not okay. We see it as a digital form and you go, well, that must be okay, but trust me it's not. PDFs are problematic. And have been problematic since the 1990s when they first came out. And I had to drop out of a Masters in Criminology purely and simply because I couldn't get material in a format that I could read.

So we still are seeing the same sorts of issues of isolation, of drop out, of no career progression, no secure employment. The same issues are still there that have been there for 40 years that I've been going to university or in university. I don't think I'm ever leaving university. So this is why we've taken this monster onboard. The problems are still there. People are more willing, like we've got a war on PDFs within my faculty.

DARREN: A war worth fighting, may I say. Look, there's a lot of myths, I suppose, that go with that that permeate as much as you're saying. A representation of what people think a typical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person looks like. These myths that have been embedded into our business practices, our thought processes and, I suppose, unpacking those is a big challenge we've got moving forward, which probably leads also to that other question, what can we do, and I suppose that's part of what the research of BlakAbility is about. What can we do to help our institutions become more aware of where they're currently seeing these gaps and failings that we can do much better at?

SHEELAGH: So I think there's a number of things we can all be doing, as either academics or professional staff. There's responsibilities and opportunities there. If you are not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, start, as I said before, befriending the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program. Start going to the events that are being held, for example, in the Reconciliation Week next week, for example. Are there exhibitions? Like, we're going to the 65,000 years of short history of art exhibition as part of Reconciliation Week next week, which I'm really looking forward to going to. We always say be visible at things. We even say this to teachers in high schools, which is where my PhD was, rock up to the football matches at the weekend. Get to be known. Okay. And just start having conversations with people and learning, and be willing, read the strategies. Put your hand up to be on committees, and so forth. Be willing to learn, be willing to stuff up, be willing to put your foot in your mouth and say the wrong thing, and then practise cultural humility and say, "Okay, teach me." Because I do it. I put my foot in my mouth more times than I care to think. But it's a willingness to learn is really important.

If you're an academic in higher education, what's your curriculum look like? What do your readings look like? Because we've got First Nations scholarship pretty much across every discipline or field these days, you know. If you're doing a survey, (a) is it accessible, but (b) are we actually asking the right questions to find out about the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disability? And like the Victorian Government in the last few years have started doing a survey every year. They've changed it. I can't think of the name of it off the top of my head, but they've started this survey for staff who have a disability, but they ask the proper questions because the people with disability designed the survey. They ask questions like, did you ask for reasonable adjustments in the last 12 months? If yes, how long did it take for that reasonable adjustment to be met? And when they were first starting to do this, it's like, "Yeah, I asked for a reasonable adjustment" or "I gave up asking because it took too long", right? So then you start getting this data again. So you start to get this picture. And over the last few years we've seen the numbers of disabled staff actually increasing. Permanent positions are more onboard. So there's a lot of lessons there that we can learn as well in our universities that is happening out there in government and in private industry, not that they've got all the answers but there's some pretty good stuff that I've come across.

So it's like what questions are you actually needing to ask? Because we don't often ask the right questions. My first question when I meet people, because I practise sticky beaking, sticking my nose into other people's business. I always say, "So how do you fit in this puzzle?" So that's my question to find out, you know, what's your story? Tell me about your life. I'm not asking if you have a disability. I'm not asking if you're Aboriginal. I'm not asking if you're multicultural, or whatever. I'm just asking you how do you fit this puzzle because once you ask that sort of question the story comes out.

DARREN: Yep.

SHEELAGH: So what's the question you need to ask.

DARREN: And you've got to start the conversation. Exactly.

SHEELAGH: You've got to start the conversation.

DARREN: Yep. And look, I am very conscious of time, and we've got a few more questions, but Sheelagh you've certainly said you'll help answer some of those and we'll put those up on the website.

SHEELAGH: I heard UDL come up before and, yes, that's a whole other conversation.

DARREN: There's whole other webinars we'll be covering that. Please join me in thanking Sheelagh for the presentation today and for the questions. Certainly your insights into and some of the research you're doing, fantastic to hear from you today. So thank you very much.

SHEELAGH: Thank you for having me.

DARREN: Thank you also to the Captioner Sharon for today. An email will be sent to everybody when the recording of this webinar is available on the ADCET website. We'd encourage you to please share this with your colleagues. We also ask that you complete a short survey on this webinar and to sign up to our newsletter, the ADCET newsletter if you're not already registered for that. Links to these will be put into the chat box for you now. Also a save your date for an upcoming webinar on preparing for exams, and doing it your way with Lernabl, which is a vendor presentation we've got coming up. Please join us next week for our Annual Accessibility in Action Awards presentation and celebration. Lots of work across the sector that we'd love to shout out to colleagues that have certainly been putting accessibility into action. Don't forget our upcoming UDL Symposium in June. Details of those are in chat and on the ADCET website.

So with that said, and we're right on time, perfect that we finished right on time, thank you very much, Sheelagh. Thank you to the ADCET crew in the background for this and please, everybody, go enjoy and start those conversations. Go have a cup of coffee with your colleagues all around the institution and please enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you for joining us.

SHEELAGH: Thanks, everyone.