ANDREW GARTNER:

Before we begin this morning, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today...

(Inaudible)

RICK BOFFA:

And also on the ground floor. If we hear evacuation alarms, which I am sure will never happen, please make your way downstairs in an orderly fashion and we will gather outside for further instructions. Novatel is a smoke-free environment, so please smoke outside if you wish.

We have also got hearing loops, Auslan interpreters and captioning available at the conference. And please follow us on social media at #Pathways14 throughout the conference.

I will now ask Petria to come up on stage. Welcome.

(Applause)

PETRIA McGOLDRICK:

Good morning, everyone. So, I am introducing this morning's keynote address. We actually have more than one person on the stage for the keynote address.

But first of all to welcome Suzanne Colbert from AND. But also to recognise we have got Georga Kemp, a former intern, and Philip Zamora who is the current Stepping Into coordinator.

So the outline of this morning's session will be a little bit interesting. A bit more variety. Suzanne will speak for about 20 minutes, and then she will direct some questions to Georga and Philip, who will be on stage with us, to get some more information about the program and their experiences. Then we will have a summary conclusion, and we will open up to the floor for more questions again.

A different way to be doing things, which is great. Before I get them up on stage, I am just going to present a little bit of information about Suzanne. Suzanne is the Chief Executive of the Australian Network on Disability, AND. Suzanne is the founding Chief Executive of the AND. Her goal in starting the organisation was to advance the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of business by collaborating with Australia's leading private and public sector organisations.

AND partners with members to build their understanding, capability and confidence to welcome people with disability as employees, customers and stakeholders. AND connects members so they can share their successes, challenges and opportunities and learn from each other.

AND is regarded as the go-to organisation for employers wanting to address the inclusion of people with disability in their business.

In 2010, Suzanne was awarded an AM in the Honours List. In 2013, she was inducted into the Disability Employment Australia’s Hall of Fame and was included in the AFR/Westpac 100 Women of Influence in 2013. Suzanne is also a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Patron of Achilles Running Club in Australia. Please join me in welcoming Suzanne, Georga, and Philip to the stage.

(Applause)

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Good morning, everyone. Good morning, everyone. I will try that again. (Laughs)

It is such a pleasure to be here, and as introduced, I have my co-conspirators here, Philip Zamora from our team, and the wonderful Georga Kemp.

When I saw on the program that I had one hour, I tried to be considerate of you and I thought you didn't really want to hear me for an hour. So I am hoping that you will hear all about the program and we will answer the question about launching careers, but to do that in a way that is a little bit different and breaking up the information.

I also pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging leaders.

The Australian Network on Disability empowers and connects employers to be actively inclusive of customers and employees with disability. For us, this really matters. It matters because if people with disability don't experience their community to be accessible and inclusive, it may diminish aspirations and hopes for career opportunities. So that's why the experience of customers and getting around the community and participating is so important to the aspirations and hopes and expectations of young people with disability as they navigate their thoughts about what they will do after school.

We are a small team. We have 18 people across Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. The reason why we go to work every day at the Australian Network on Disability is because we believe people with disability are social and economic contributors with skills and capabilities who should have the same life choices and economic opportunities as others.

We also believe that it is employers who can drive disability confidence, engagement and action. They are the ones with the jobs, they are the ones with the power and influence, and for us, harnessing their influence and power is what matters. And the way that we get that done is through the power of networks, the power of relationships and collaboration to achieve change, to grow knowledge and share expertise.

Because the more we can share that expertise, the more rapidly we can increase our learning and capability to be inclusive.

So in combination, our members employ about 1.6 million Australians. My guess is you already know a lot about us. How many people in the room know about the Australian Network on Disability? Yay! That's fantastic! Thank you! How many people in the room have encouraged students to consider applying for the Stepping Into program? Fantastic, thank you.

You are so important to our network and I would not be here presenting today if it was not for you. Or those who have distributed information to students and shared our many social media posts and invited us to your events and encouraged students to apply, thank you. Please continue.

I want to give you a little bit of history. Sometimes things just happen. It is kind of a confluence of events. But around 2003-4 we were getting phone calls in our office particularly from university students studying law. And that was because we had been doing a project with the Law Society of NSW.

The students had heard about the project with the Law Society and had challenged us why they could never get a job. They were graduates, really, that couldn't get a job in law. So we thought we would put some people together and try to understand that.

With the Law Society, we brought some firms together and asked why they didn't ever recruit law graduates with disability. Their response was a little surprising to us, they said, "We never meet law graduates with disability."

And so we went on a journey to really understand that the way to a career in law was through summer clerkships. And we learned that firms would get 1200 applications for 40 opportunities. And from the firm's perspective, how do you get down from 1200 to 40 as fast and efficiently as you can? So it was pretty ruthless. If anyone had a semester off, or anything was done differently, those students never got to that summer clerkship.

So we asked the firms, "What could you do to give law students the opportunity to showcase their skills and talents?" And then we designed a winter program just for law students with disability, so they didn't need to compete with those other 1199 students.

We started off with Stepping Into Law and the very first cohort was seven students. And I am really proud to say that one of those students, Rania Saab, is now on our board. She works for Legal Aid NSW as a solicitor and it is fantastic to have her on our board.

We designed the program to be a winter program, 152 hours of paid work, because being winter there was limited time, and we agreed from the beginning with the employers that we were not going to talk about the students' disability. We would talk about the adjustments they required but it was not up to us to share information about disability.

We briefed students, we helped them apply, we provided disability confidence training and briefing to the firms and also to the teams where the first series of interns were going to be. And that was a great success. So at the end of that first round, everybody was happy. And we figured we would do it again.

So what has happened since then? Well, since then, 1031 interns have had paid employment opportunities. We have had applications from 2865 students. And we have had 111 participating employers.

And the program is really growing. So, during 2017/18, you can see we had 47 employers. And we proudly worked with 47 universities. So we have started to build some scale. And indeed, this summer… This data is from 2017/19, so 190 internships, we have gone from 7 to 190.

How does it work? I won't go into detail because Phil is the expert and he can answer your questions, it is a demand-led program. We don't keep a pool of students, if you like. We go to our members twice a year in February and August and ask them if they would like to employ students over the winter or the summer semester break. And then we ask them why. Why would they like to, what do they want to get out of it?

And according to what they say next, we prioritise the students. So, for those organisations who see Stepping Into as a pipeline into their graduate program, then we want to maximise the opportunity of that occurring. And for those who also want to help their managers to be disability confident and have that experience, that is also an important goal.

We don't place such a high priority but it is still important for the organisations who participate for corporate social responsibility reasons. Those are the three key reasons. Pipeline talent into graduate program, helping managers build skills and experience as inclusive leaders, and corporate social responsibility.

We are seeing a lot less firms participating for corporate social responsibility reasons now and it is much more about pipeline talent which is very pleasing.

We ask them about what kind of discipline or degree they would like to attract. We ask them for position descriptions. And then we come to you with those opportunities in the hope that you will broadcast them and promote them to students with disability in their penultimate or final year.

This summer, we received over 500 applications from students. And we meet every one of those students. We interview them through Skype or in our office. Because that is really very important. It is testament to our awesome programs team to be able to interview every single one of those 500 students.

But what really matters is that we work very hard to match the right student with the right opportunity in the right location. And we have found that students are very happy to travel. Some of them are able to travel. In fact, I think this summer we have five students doing fly-in-fly-out roles for BHP. Which is pretty amazing.

So we shortlist students for our members. We ask them to interview all of the shortlisted students because it is a great experience for the student and it is a fantastic opportunity for our members to meet a range of skilled and talented students with disability.

One fantastic outcome from asking our members to interview all the shortlisted students is that they might have requested 4 interns – and this happened this week, the Department of Finance in Canberra said they would like 4 interns but they interviewed 6 of them and offered them all the opportunity. We just love that. That is fantastic.

It is fantastic we are growing the program, but we also really need to understand, is it delivering on the promises? Is it delivering on making the impact, and that is why we recently did a review. I have to thank Pathways because doing a review of the program was on my list for about 18 months, so when I got the opportunity to speak with you this morning it was like, "Oh, my God, I have got a date! Get this done!" So you really helped us to get that done.

So when we think about why we do this, and what is the impact we hope for, what we hope for our employers is that they genuinely see graduates with disability as a viable and valuable talent pool. That's so important for the future employment of people with disability.

We want managers to build confidence and capability to be inclusive leaders. And we hope that they will recruit people with disability given the chance – not just our Stepping Into program, but anyone who knocks on the door, who has a disability, and can meet the requirements of their role. Those are the two important areas for our members.

But for students, we want students to feel more confident, to be aspirational, to be empowered. Really importantly, to compete with students without disability when they complete their studies. Of course, after the internship they need to return to their studies, but it's about getting a job after uni.

And then every three years or so, we try to reconnect with students to find out about what has happened. And so the purpose of our recent evaluation was to understand the impact of the program on both students and our members. And we contracted people to do the work for us. They surveyed interns and unsuccessful applicants. And it is the first time we have surveyed unsuccessful applicants, and we were really pleased that we got a good response rate from them as well.

They also supervised managers from our members and ran focus groups with members from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. So this is the kind of result that we see. So the students who did the Stepping Into program, 80% of them had jobs four months after graduation. So we were pretty happy with that outcome.

When we first looked at the data, we noticed that there were some other internships and so I asked them to do an analysis. And we can see that any internship, beyond Stepping Into, still 67% of those students had employment outcomes at four months. Unfortunately for students who don't get an internship, their success rate was lower.

But I think there are two things here. One is clearly our program is working well. But secondly, any internship program is better than none. And research from pretty much all around the world, and the work that Kevin Murfitt has done, really bears that out as well.

So that's very positive. And it tells us we are on the right page there. I think… This is the slide I am looking for. I think the other thing that really matters is the relationship between the area of study and the work that the students did. And for me, that's really important. It is not just any job. Having a job as a barista is good but not after you have spent four years studying at University.

So the other test was, was the job related to their studies? And we can see that a high degree of Stepping Into students secured roles related to their studies. And also that people who wanted to work part-time could actually make that choice. And we hope that is partly because our members are more flexible. But also a high degree of full-time employment.

The thing that I think is also important is about casual employment. Casual employment just doesn't feel very secure. So it's fantastic that of the students who worked in casual employment, it was so much less than otherwise. So I think it is very compelling that doing an internship during study really does make a difference to launching careers.

And we will come back and answer questions around that. But we are very excited about these results, and it tells us that we are achieving our objectives. And we did ask students about how they think the Stepping Into program assisted them in their career. And this is what they said.

It is just putting something on their resume that makes them competitive with other graduates, that's important. Confidence is really, really important. Gaining additional skills, performing better at job interviews, asking for work place adjustments that they needed. That's just really valuable, particularly through a competitive process. And then having a network of contacts.

Unfortunately 3%, a small number, but still, they felt the program did not offer them any benefit. But that's OK, we're going to focus on the 97% because we think that is what really matters.

So what about employers? What impact is it having on them? So my main motivation is to expand employment opportunities for people with disability, but we really need to see the changed members because that is going to make the program sustainable.

This is a quote from one of our members, "In year one, participation was all about doing the right thing, the social good," and I touched on corporate social responsibility before, and after that, they realised that even if those students were not have had on paper the same academic result, they wanted to make sure they got the best interns because it is all about having well-rounded people that can contribute to the workplace. So it really does make a difference not only just to focus on academic results, because academic results are not necessarily the only predictor of success in employment. So it's really important to make sure that we get that right.

What the supervisors said, 93% said they would be happy to be a referee for the intern. So that is fantastic. 88% of supervisors were first timers, which means that it is not staying pocketed in some areas of the business, it is being dispersed across the organisation and really increasing penetration. 96% of supervisors said they would volunteer again. And 91% said they saw benefits to their team. 87% said they were more confident about managing and supporting a team member with disability.

And we also find apart from what the supervisors think, at the organisational level members are developing more inclusive practices such as asking candidates about adjustments for interviews, providing documents in accessible formats, providing applicants with disability more time to compete with recruitment activities. So there is change at that level as well.

Stepping Into interns make a contribution to their employers not just by producing high-quality work but by enhancing the leadership skills of their supervisors. Let me give you example from some of our members. Telstra have hosted 127 interns since July 2014. They have introduced a target that 10% of all the graduates would be grads with disability. And as a result of the Stepping Into program 17% of their graduate intake have disability.

The Commonwealth Bank had 11 interns applying to their graduate program and seven were successful. Stockland Group have consistently provided intern opportunities for 10 consecutive years. I wrote to their Chief Executive last Friday and congratulated them on the many opportunities from all around the country that they have provided. And as I said earlier, a total of 111 employers have participated in the program.

So what I have done is given you a whole range of numbers, a whole bunch of words, but I think it's really important to make it human. Because we talk about programs, but really, at the end of the day it is all about people. And I will hand over shortly to Georga and Phil to talk about it from their perspective. But I will start with some questions for Georga.

Georga, do you want to talk about your first internship? When did you first do your internship?

GEORGA KEMP:

I did my internship in 2016. I started out at IP Australia and I was there for four weeks. Then I completed my last year of university and completed another application for a further internship in 2017. And I am lucky to still be at that place. I am now at the Department of Family and Community Services in NSW.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

How did you go from doing the internship at FACS to your current role? What was the trajectory?

GEORGA KEMP:

When I walked into Department of Family and Community Services, they were in a unique program about consolidating websites. And my supervisor at the time was really keen to keep me on board. We had a conversation about the second week into my internship as to whether I was interested in staying on, and what kind of career pathway I was looking for. And it just eventuated from there.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Fantastic. And when you're at university, did you have concerns about getting a job?

GEORGA KEMP:

Absolutely. As a person with disability, you never quite know where you lose out. You never quite get told what opportunities are available or are not available. And I think that just comes from a natural progression of education. I say that in the very loose sense, but I think when you go through primary school and high school, you have that support available. And going through uni, you also have that support.

But I know for myself, I never quite got told what could happen afterwards. I never quite got told, yes, that support does continue in the job, or that the opportunities are still there. And I came from the University of Newcastle, and halfway through my degree, I started to really think about, how is my disability going to affect what I can do afterwards?

I was very lucky to have a very supportive learning development unit at Newcastle. I reached out to them and had a talk about what they do and what other support I could get. That's how I found out about Stepping Into. It took a little bit more courage than what I expected to actually apply at first. And yeah, from there, it gave me a huge boost of confidence and understanding that it was available, and that the support is just given.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Fantastic, thank you. And now you have been appointed as an ongoing employee?

GEORGA KEMP:

Yes. I am now a permanent employee. And I am very happy there.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

That's fantastic. We will open up for questions. I'm sure we're dying to hear about your future career aspirations as well.

So, Phil has been leading the Stepping Into program, doing the mammoth task of all those interviews etc. Phil, when students first make contact, what kind of questions do they ask? Because it is still applying for something, it's a big task, you don't want to put your time into something if you are not going to be successful, so what kind of questions do you hear from students?

PHILIP ZAMORA:

Thanks, Suzanne. The initial question is, "Do I need to share my disability to the employers?" So we encourage them, we do an information session, and they don't need to share further information about the disability. And then going into the information about Stepping Into, their disability will not be a barrier to obtain an internship through AND.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

And what about adjustments? Can you give us an example of straightforward adjustments or the more complex ones, what is the most commonly requested?

PHILIP ZAMORA:

I will give you a bit of background for the Stepping Into program recruitment process. When students complete the application form, we invite them for a Skype interview. During the Skype interview, we discuss what workplace adjustments are, what are reasonable adjustments.

There is no financial cost, but the most common adjustment asked for is flexibility in working hours. Flexibility is there. They need that because sometimes they need to go to medical appointments, or they have study commitments. And for the more complex adjustments, if people identify themselves as having low vision, they ask for a screen reader. And students ask us, "What if the employer cannot provide a screen reader?"

Then we explain that we will request the adjustment from the host employer and they will be able to provide that. And if there is a financial cost, then we have to let them know as well. And JobAccess helps out with the financial costs for the adjustments.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Have we ever had anyone say no? Has an employer ever said they would not make the adjustment? I am asking that question at risk here.

PHILIP ZAMORA:

(Laughs) The member organisations definitely say… We have never received a 'no' answer. We receive a lot of questions from employers, "How do we do workplace adjustments? What are they? Can you help us?" And then we connect them with the network resources of AND, and we provide advice on how to implement adjustments in the workplace. Because as I said, students need that information from us as a guarantee that their disability will not hinder them from obtaining an internship.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Fantastic, thank you. What about checking in? After the intern starts, we brief the supervisor, then how often do we check in?

PHILIP ZAMORA:

Firstly, students receive an email from us, a 'good luck' email. Then we do weekly check-ins with supervisors. The reason is to address any challenges, and also to have that personal approach for the student and supervisor because we would like to be there from the start to the finish. And to be able to help them if there are any challenges or issues along the way in the program. So we do weekly check-ins for supervisors and the interns.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Thank you. Do you have a favourite story, Phil?

PHILIP ZAMORA:

One favourite story would be an intern from Apple. He said that the recruitment process to get an internship with Apple is pretty hectic, like really hard! So when we did the PACE mentoring program completion with them, I came up and asked, "How is everything? How was the internship going?"

And he said that from day one up until last week, his confidence has really increased. And he said that without the experience that he went through with Apple's recruitment process, he would not be able to have reached this confidence level as of last week.

And also he said that doing the program, the Stepping into program, helped him to be more understanding and have an open mind about everything. He said that disability should not define a person, it is ability. Of course adjustments might be needed but disability should not define a person.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Thank you. When it comes to your aspirations, you need your confidence. Georga and I talked about that in the car. And how all of us, when we think about how we are doing in our jobs, we are probably harder on ourselves and we really need that confidence and support in order to be more aspirational.

Do you want to address that confidence issue, Georga?

GEORGA KEMP:

As you were saying, we had that conversation in the car. I was just reflecting upon the change I had from completing the first internship to my second one. And that was a pivotal moment for me because coming into that first internship, I was really stuck on where I was going and what I wanted to progress with in terms of a career pathway or what kind of opportunities I was looking for.

After that first internship, I really was very settled and I had a much clearer mind about the kind of things I wanted to achieve. And knowing that the last year of university mattered, but at the same time I knew I had had that moment of, yeah, OK, I'm on the right path and I can do this. And that was great. Funnily enough, in between my two internships, I went overseas and completed an internship over there. So it kind of led to a few little things which amounted to some great moments for me.

I would say that without Stepping Into, I definitely wouldn't be in the position I am in right now. I think Stepping Into, like Phil and Suzanne said, it is really just having someone to back you. And it is having someone else to kind of go, "We can do all this for you and we can enable you so you can achieve all these things," and that is really powerful.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Thank you. It reminds me that the program isn't linear. I remember one particular student applied for Stepping Into, and he was not successful. So we asked him whether he would like to participate in the mentoring program which is called Positive Action for Career Engagement and he participated in what we call PACE, then he reapplied for the Stepping Into program and was successful with the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet. And then he rolled into their graduate program.

So part of it is being provided with the right thing at the right time. As you know, we are a tiny organisation and we can't do everything. Our main business is supporting our now 240 members. But it is also harnessing the energy and opportunity from those members to do really good things. And our mentoring program just gives people an extra step.

In the early days we facilitated Willing and Able Mentoring. Those of you who have been around for a while may remember this Willing and Able Mentoring. We met up with a man called Cameron and he came to be a mentor through WAM. His mum was at the office at the time and his mum came with them. And I explained to his mum that she could not participate in mentoring meetings. And she questioned this and said, "But I do everything with Cameron," and I said, "Well, when Cameron is getting a job, that is not going to work out."

So it took a little while to convince Cameron and his mum that if he wanted to get a job, it would not be able to be together. So Cameron, I think, did at least two mentoring programs with WAM at the time. Then he did two separate internships at Stepping Into. The second one was at the ATO. And I came to learn that both his parents worked at the ATO, so the mum thing was getting closer!

But at least he was travelling independently. And he was doing a lot more things on his own. And he was just so committed to getting a job at the ATO, and he was successful. As I said, it took him at least two mentoring rounds and two Stepping Into rounds, but he met his destination.

The point is different students with different disabilities need different ways of approaching it, sometimes more and sometimes less. But we should have the flexibility to be able to work in a way that is going to help that student or that intern to their destination.

I would like to now open it up to you for some questions.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, Georga. Matt from Wellington, New Zealand. I am really curious at what time in your university journey would it be best to have the conversation about internships and employment?

GEORGA KEMP:

That conversation eventuated from an email I received. With Stepping Into, normally if you're on… I can't even think of the word. If you are interested in internships, the Stepping Into program sent an email and they said, "If you're interested, we can have a conversation about what you would like to do and the steps you can take to apply." And I replied to that email, "I want to find out more, can I come in and have a conversation?"

Then we went from there. It's a self-evolving process and with the support of the learning and development team, that's how I started the conversation. I would say it took a month for me to gear up to apply. Thank you.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Suzanne, the members… Sorry, I am over here. The members, from what we see, the internships tend to be in law, IT, business areas. Is there much happening in the creative industries space? Is it an area where you can see some potential growth or links you can develop?

SUZANNE COLBERT:

It is a demand-led program. It is very much demand-led. When I think about the creative industries, they haven't joined us as members. So they are not expressing interest.

We did try a project in NSW called Idea and we worked with the creative industries primarily in the government or not-for-profit sectors. And basically the story was, "We don't have any money, we don't have any time, we are under-resourced, and not only that, everyone is bashing on the door to get our jobs."

So for us, we want to swim down the river where it is going to get a really good return on investment. So, for us, to put it really crudely, it is a bit of 'follow the money'. If the creative industries would like to invest, we will absolutely help them. But it is not a government-funded program, it is funded by organisations so they have to want to.

We don't knock on doors asking organisations to take students. What we do is ask members who are engaged in changing the life chances of people with disability to make it real by providing opportunities.

So if a whole industry sector does not participate, it is because they don't choose to.

But great question.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, Suzanne. Elicia Ford, National Disability Coordination Officer at the Centre for Disability Studies NSW. Earlier, you spoke about graduate employment outcomes and the 80% AND internships versus 50% for other internships. Can you tell us what you think your critical success factors are that differentiate AND internships versus others?

SUZANNE COLBERT:

We don't really know how the other internship programs work, but we would guess, and we have had these discussions internally, that maybe there is not such an explicit opportunity for students to ask for adjustments. So there might be more mainstream internship opportunities which would be fabulous for people, still better than none, but it is very explicit that students have an opportunity to ask for what they need with us. And I think that helps, it helps from the confidence perspective. It helps that they know and they specifically want to attract a student with disability.

As I said, we have a briefing session with the organisation and we provide briefings to the students. Everyone is invested in the success of the student. The student is being supported and developed and knows how to ask the right questions, but the supervisor and the company are also being invested in and I think that really helps. It is an active approach.

DAVID ECKSTEIN:

David Eckstein, Swinburne University. I work in the careers office, we support student applications to AND programs…

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Yay!

DAVID ECKSTEIN:

And it would be helpful for us to know, if you are able to share, the number of students that are unsuccessful in their applications, and if you can offer any feedback on what those students might do differently.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Yeah, thank you. I might just ask Phil, we encourage our members to give feedback to the students if they are unsuccessful, what happens, Phil?

PHILIP ZAMORA:

If they are unsuccessful being shortlisted, we will let them know and provide feedback they can take on to the next application. But if they are shortlisted with a member organisation, we encourage the member or the hiring manager to provide feedback to the student, the shortlisted student. The reason is so they can take on board and learn from that experience. And then they can improve on it.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Thank you. I think the supervisors probably find that hard. They don't really want to do that. But we do strongly encourage them. We don't have a punishment regime in place if they don't, but we strongly encourage them because it is a good way to invest people in knowing what they could do differently.

And as I said, we encourage students to then participate in mentoring which might help them be successful for the next time.

MICHELLE WOODS:

I am Michelle Woods, from Monash Uni. Leading on from that question, are there key things the students are not doing well in the interview that they could improve on? Is there a top five list that we could go back to students and say, "Make sure you do this in the interview"?

PHILIP ZAMORA:

Before students are shortlisted, we run an information session for them. Job tips, top tips as to how you present yourself in an interview, and the number-one tip we could give to students is the way they answer questions. Students should give appropriate examples using the STARS technique.

I know interviews are nerve-wracking. Even when I applied for the role with AND, I was nervous and sweating. I nearly sweated my life away! But we encourage students to have that preparation for the interview, to practice with their friends, or their families, so they can ask for feedback how they are going.

I think number one, it could be just the preparation and answering or giving the appropriate examples for the interview questions. Thank you.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Thank you. I think that's an area to really watch when we see the way that selection processes are going. I don't know whether you have heard of products like HireVue, but using artificial intelligence in interviews is going to seriously disadvantage jobseekers with disability, not only university graduates with disability but everyone who is even slightly different. When we see AI making selection decisions, it is going to make a big difference.

So if you've got a chance and you're interested, HireVue is fascinating. But we need to make sure… Those programs are used prolifically in Australia and I have got an interview with Al McEwin to go through the risks involved should lots of companies start to use products like HireVue.

How are we going for time? We have run out of time. In conclusion, Stepping Into does make a positive contribution to students and to their employers, not just by producing high-quality work that by enhancing the leadership skills of supervisors. We know that from our research that Stepping Into interns are more likely to be employed in a role related to their studies.

The internship program is a sustainable program. It is not funded by government, it is not reliant on government funding streams. And that is a strength, a product that has strengths and weaknesses, but at least employers are paying for it, they are paying the students, and it is absolutely sustainable. It does change attitudes.

In terms of next steps, we are running a program in Victoria called Connect50. Has anyone heard of it? Yay! It is in Bendigo, Ballarat, Latrobe Valley and Geelong. It will be the first time we are focusing on a regional area, and we will be focusing on regional employers who are not our members. And we will also be extending internship opportunities to TAFE students for the first time. So that is breaking some new ground.

From the review that we have done, we are also going to develop an alumni. Because it is not enough just to get into a job. It is getting in the door, getting up and developing tomorrow's leaders. And I would be happy to bet my next pay cheque that Georga is going to be one of those leaders of tomorrow. And that is fantastic, and we really need to see that happen. So our alumni program will have a range of opportunities. So that's very exciting.

And look, while we feel like we have made very good progress and I am very proud of our Stepping Into program, we can't do it without you. We are all in this together. And by working together, we will create the changes that we really want to see – a more accessible and inclusive Australia that is fairer for everyone.

So can we thank George and Phil?

(Applause)

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Thank you so very much. And I hope you have a truly enjoyable day. Thank you.

(Applause)

PETRIA McGOLDRICK:

Once again, thank you to Suzanne. To Georga, for your personal insights which are really valuable for us to hear what goes on for the person themselves. And to Philip, for giving us what we are often seeking, that operational information, how things work. And Suzanne, for providing the overall picture and for being an inspiration in the organisation itself and its achievements.

I must say, I was going to make a couple of personal points, that I started in the university sector the year that the Stepping Into program started. So it has been wonderful to watch that journey and see the changes. And I recall that we discussed Stepping Into at various Pathways conferences.

I recall a discussion in Adelaide and I think it was quite valuable to get feedback from us using the program for the point of view of supporting our students and we sort of said, "How about this? How about that? It is always about law students, business students..." And leading on from that, if I can give you a couple of personal examples, I had a young gentleman who started UOW and he was studying environmental science. He had autism spectrum disorder. So he went through the program, he did Stepping Into in Canberra. He lived in Wollongong and he went to Canberra.

It was a major step. Because it was not just about doing the internship, but doing an internship in another city he had never lived in. But that was a great opportunity. It gave him that opportunity to be more independent and build his skills. And then he finished the program. And when he graduated, he applied to the graduate program and that same department then employed him in a full-time position. So that was a great achievement and it was stepping outside of law and business.

I also had another student who had an engineering placement, and what was useful for that, once again when you are in a regional area, even though Wollongong is reasonably close to Sydney, it is not as close as it can be for some of our students, so what was negotiated was a change in worksite. It was the same government department, but they moved the site to the Illawarra and that made it much easier.

So I really appreciated those bits of flexibility that came not just around work hours, but in our instance, and I'm not sure if it happens more regularly, but to actually look at the site and particularly from the point of view that not all of our students live in major cities. I think that's a great opportunity.

As I said, once again, thank you very much to all three of you for coming today. We have really appreciated what you provided to us. And we actually have three gifts now. We weren't expecting necessarily Georga and Philip, so we went, "Quick!" We had to scramble. It is always good to be well organised. We had spare gifts.

SUZANNE COLBERT:

Thank you so much. Unexpected and appreciated.

PETRIA McGOLDRICK:

Can I ask you to thank them again very much.

(Applause)

PETRIA McGOLDRICK:

It is morning tea time. And after morning tea is the concurrent sessions. And just a reminder, if you are not sure which one to select, go to the website and read the abstracts for those sessions. Thank you very much.

(Morning tea)

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

Hello, everyone. Welcome back. I hope everybody enjoyed lunch. So, we are moving into the plenary session 3, I'd like to introduce Jessica May. Jessica May is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of the innovative Web-based, Enabled Employment which is an online jobs portal with a focus on achieving true diversity in the workplace. They specialise in sourcing people from diverse backgrounds and are representative of the entire population, such as people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the LGBTIQ community and service men and women.

Enabled Employment was founded after Jessica's own experience with disability, and is an entirely new approach to eliminating barriers with employment. The company uses multiple innovative elements including machine learning, the employment agency business model and the latest cloud technology to make finding suitable work easy for both businesses and candidates.

Enabled Employment has won multiple awards including the Stevie Awards, Women in Business Start-up of the Year and Most Innovative Company of the Year. A United Nations Disability Award and the Australian Human Resources Institute Graeme Innes AM Disability Employment Award as well as Sir Ken Robinson's Award for Workplace Flexibility.

Jessica has also been recognised personally by winning the National Telstra Women's Business Awards for the start-up company and being named Entrepreneur of the Year in 2016. I would like to welcome Jessica to the stage.

JESSICA MAY:

Thank you very much for the introduction. My name is Jessica May, I’m the Chief Executive Officer and founder of Enabled Employment and probably one thing that you don't know about me although it was mentioned is I have a disability. I suffer from mental illness, I have since I was a small child. I have managed to keep it in check by seeing psychologists and psychiatrists, mindfulness all of that sort of stuff.

I will tell you about my story today and the gap in the market that we found and trying to fill that. It is a positive story which is nice in the current environment we are in at the moment, and I would like to note there is no data in my slides, they are just pictures and I will tell the story about them so you don't need to feel like you're missing out if you can't see the presentation.

So, on with the show, this is me, it is in 2006 when I was 26 and I had just joined the public service when I was 24, and within six years I went from an APS 1 to executive level 2. I chose not to disclose my disability because I didn't want to and it meant I could focus on everybody else's problems and became a workaholic. I was on the fast track to becoming a senior executive, I was doing really well, with a scholarship in Information Technology.

In 2011, my daughter was born three weeks before that picture was taken, with my pregnancy I had a lot of complications, post and during. I ended up with a lot of tumours, and my thyroid went into inactivity and almost killed itself and then it went into hyperactivity. When they found that, my daughter was eight weeks old and my resting heart rate was 180 bpm. You can imagine, the only way they picked it up was because I was feeling anxious all the time, I kept standing up and falling over.

So anxiety, postnatal depression, I was suffering very badly and this was compounded by the fact that I had a really good baby. She slept all the time, she never cried, I just sat at home thinking about everything, getting worse and worse. One thing I wanted to do was get back to work as soon as possible, as soon as I could. I saw my doctor and she said I totally agree, I will not let you go back five days a week, you will go back three days a week.

I fought really hard, I wanted to go back five days a week, I got a letter from the psychologist, everything went back. In the public service you do a graduating returns to work program if you can't go back, unfortunately for me, the people who were handed the information about my treatment and my previous mental health problems didn't keep it a secret as they should have. It should have been confidential and so I went back to work thinking here we go, I will be so busy and have so much happening and get so much better.

I got there, I went from 17 staff, working on a billion-dollar program to I don't want to stress Jessica out, she has too much going on, I won't give her too much to do. They took away my program, took away my staff and I was an executive level two with nobody, not working on special projects. My mental health declined so rapidly and I really wanted to touch today on assumptions and how damaging assumptions can be for people with a disability or anyone who is facing disadvantage.

I think assumptions is the root of all discrimination all the time. I know, what is it? Less than 1% of the population are psychopaths so less than 1% of the population want to intentionally hurt you, the rest of the time discrimination happens normally by accident. And normally because someone has made an assumption about what a person needs rather than just asking them upfront what they need. If anybody had spoken to me, I would have said I want to be as busy as possible, I want to work as many hours as possible, give me the biggest, meatiest task I can work on and that will help me.

Instead the complete opposite happened. I'm sure everybody in this room is totally aware, sometimes they are not, but 20% of the population have a disability, 4 1/2 billion people, a whole lot. 90% of those disabilities are invisible, you would never actually know that that person has a disability. And I think that is really important again, when we come into those assumptions.

One of the biggest challenges we face is they want all the disabilities to be visible so that they can show they are hiring people with disabilities. That is so damaging and that is why people can't meet their quotas, because they don't even recognise a whole range of disabilities which means they are excluding a whole group of people from the workplace.

Just to touch on that, as we all know in here, disabilities are so diverse and so different, the Disability Employment Service requirements only cover 10% of people with a disability. That normally falls into the quite severe limitations and restrictions, and the NDIS is 6% of people with a disability. There is 90% of people here who don't have any assistance or help from the government to try and find employment. That is the filling the gap in the market that we started looking at.

So I think we all know again about the stereotypes, people think that people with a disability, when they come into the workplace, there will be more work for them, they will have more sick leave, more workers compensation claims. This comes into the biggest blockers that we face in the business, middle managers. Most people are inherently selfish, it is not a bad thing, but they think it is going to be more work for them or cause problems for them. So they generally put a blocker in. We want to challenge the stereotypes and get more people into work.

Things that work really well that I have seen, having mentorship programs. Having a senior manager matched up with someone with a disability, it doesn't necessarily work in the organisation, the middle manager thinks that they are helping a person with a disability. But it is actually the opposite. It is about exposing them to somebody with a disability and changing their mindset.

We have seen at work really well, five or six years ago senior executives had their mindset changed at a certain point. Culture changes in tiny pockets by recognition. That is one way they can change, but it does take a long time. The other one which was successful which was the Disability Champions of Change. People coming out and saying they had a disability, talking about it all the time and using every bit of flexibility in the workplace. And leading by example and showing they are not getting discriminated against them it is OK for you to come out.

We have seen the work increase and people willing to disclose that they have a disability. Still a long way to go. We identified there was a big gap, especially for people like me. There is disability employment service providers, whereas a lot of people, we don't need that help and support from the government. They generally focus on entry-level programs, not people who might not have disclosed and have managed to be in the employment market for a long time and don't want to 150% every day to manage their condition, they want to be open about it and tell people that they have it.

So what we built was a way to come out and try to make a private company that allows people who are highly skilled and just want to get back into workplaces, to have that sort of idea. My background is in software development so I wanted to automate as much of that is possible. So we built it as a fully online platform, so that we could be nationwide, a really small staff base as well.

The biggest point of difference that we wanted to do was not the government, we wanted to be private. We want is a charge for our services because when you give somebody a job because of a disadvantaged background, it generally does not work out, they might be given a job that is well beneath their expectations or abilities. So what we do is take every job, we go in and don't identify the jobs that you want to give us. Generally they will be scanning low levels, reception and things. So we get all the jobs and try to fill them, and we fill all the requirements of the job.

A lot of the things we are looking at changing its flexibility, I think flexibility is the solution for pretty much everything, if you have flexibility in the workplace, you can manage your conditions or heritage for all sorts of things, workplaces that embraces change, it makes a huge difference.

After about six months we started to realise it wasn't just people with a disability who are facing that same disadvantage and discrimination with employment. The first expansion we did was into ex-service personnel, especially those suffering post-traumatic stress. We won't be putting a person in employment with a huge stack of paper saying here is everything that can go wrong because when you tell somebody here is everything that can go wrong, they make everything go wrong. They start making assumptions about what can go wrong.

Sometimes it is quite dangerous to push that, we put a person in the job, the thing we ask is what do you need to do the best you can in that interview? And we make that happen. When they get a job we say, what can make you do your best in the job? And we make that happen. There is an open dialogue, no asking stupid questions and getting rid of the fear base. We are trying to change the view that this is a charity case, this is what could go wrong, this is what will go wrong, it is just a person coming in for a job who needs some reasonable changes to make it easier for them to do it.

The other big issue that we really saw in the employment market was everybody was focusing on permanent, I know the Disability Employment Services require this, there must be a certain number of weeks, it can't be contractor or this and that, all of that sort of stuff, it can't be work experience, I don't know about anybody else who has gone into employment, but I worked in a three-month contract in the public service, you get in, everybody liked me, I learnt all the acronyms and lingo, but when we don't have that kind of availability for people, how can you leave school and get experience to then be able to get a job that is long enough for that period?

We introduced labour hire. So we could do one day or three day or five-day contracts. So you could apply through that also with job boards. Unfortunately what we found, labour hire, they still won't count those figures towards employment participation so we can get hundreds of people in their own contract but they won't recognise to say they are doing a good thing. As in finding employment steppingstones, I don't think many people don't work like that. I wanted to go low, tried being a hairdresser, I went to Coles, then from there I was able to go to the public service doing IT.

It was a progression. I think we focus too much on finding people something permanently immediately.

This is the participant part of my presentation. I have a photo of Stephen Hawking on the screen. A brilliant man, I don't think he ever faced those issues where people thought that perhaps his brain wasn't there just because he is in a wheelchair. He is a really good example when I want to talk about disclosure and assumptions.

I don't know if you have seen his stints on Little Britain with people shouting at him. He faces that every day but he had a really big public presentation so that is a good example for us today.

Quite a few years ago he did a world tour, A Journey Through Time. One of those was an evening here at the Opera House. We were all going to be the organisers for it and I want you to shout out what you think he would have required for that tour.

A lift, great. A lift to get on the stage. Carers. Accessible toilets, definitely. I don't know if the Opera House does so great with that. What else, especially on his travel here?

Business class. How would he get onto the plane? I don't know about you but I have had some of my friends forklifted onto planes, it is terrible. What else?

Accommodation. Carers. Anything else? Definitely technical support. Looking that up to make him go through all the speakers. No what happened when they asked him what he wanted to do? He didn't want to travel, he projected himself as a hologram onto the stage.

I think it was the first time it was done. It was really cool. That is what happens when you ask people, it is so different to what you expect they are going to need. There is my example of what I needed when I went back to work. An example of what people need when they are travelling. Everybody is different and everybody is an individual.

I know last year TEDx did the huge push, they wanted to capitalise and did a big thing about disability. They came out with this, just ask me. Then there was this uproar, I don't want people asking me, "What is your mental illness?" They forgot the whole preface of that is that I am a person, do you know me enough to ask me?

When you're trying to think of accommodations and adjustments, just ask them. We tried to give them advice, it didn't come out very well. I don't think it did very well.

Next one is a really good one. This is Sharon, she works with me. She is a media liaison and communications officer. She used to work directly for Prime Minister John Howard. She has written books on the Islamic community. She is a qualified journalist. She suffers from mental illness as well as spinal stenosis.

When I approached her, I knew she hadn't been able to get any work because she didn't want to leave her house. So I said you can work from home, you can do whatever you want. Sharon suffers from really bad insomnia so I wake up in the morning and she has checked all the media and is ready to go. Best arrangement ever.

She is one of the best workers we ever had. Before, the reason she wasn't working, she was working in the public service and she was moved into a brand-new building so sometimes she has to walk with a walking stick, and the brand-new building was the latest, state-of-the-art, met all the disability guidelines, except the area where she was seated, they had a fire door in the kitchen.

Fire doors, they are really heavy. So she was fine when she went in to get something. Go in, get a cup of tea, it was just coming back. Can’t really open it. So she would always have to ask someone, I am going to get a cup of tea, can you open the door for me when I can come back out?

Sharon didn't care. Do you know who complained?

SPEAKER:

(Inaudible)

JESSICA MAY:

Exactly. An absolute meltdown. There is always parodies of the public service but that is what it is like. Meetings were called, senior executives, who are specialists, came in. It met disability standards, what are we going to do? We have to knock down this wall to put special doors that open the right way. It was chaos.

The decision was made, Sharon wasn't involved in any of those meetings, Sharon was moved to another building that didn't have that. Not the whole team, just Sharon. She was moved down to a brutalist architecture building. So every meeting she had, she had to walk up the hill. A lot of times she had a transport booked so she would be taking the trolley. It is a pretty bad story. But she said if she could have been invited to one meeting she would have said, can we go to a Bunnings and get a five dollar shelf so I can stick it on the wall and put my mug on there so I can open the door.

She was never given that opportunity. I did a presentation yesterday where they had a shelf there. It was the exact same story. It does happen but a lot of the time it doesn't. It is just about thinking differently and I hope that is what I am getting across today.

We have been lucky. We had a lot of different contracts with different people. The biggest challenge was people who sign up and put in all of the information and annual reports that they are working with us, but they never have actually asked us for advice.

As a person with a disability, I have had a great career from this. A couple of years ago I advised Vice President Joe Biden for what they should do. Telstra Business Woman of the Year. When you're thinking about hiring someone with a disability, think about would you like to hire me? And are your channels open enough to hire someone like me or do you have enough of a reach to make someone like me feel comfortable with applying.

You really need to work on the culture. That is what you get from me. I'm happy to answer any questions.

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

We have some time for questions.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I just want to say congratulations.

JESSICA MAY:

Thanks. Sometimes when I do these speeches, it is just a stunned silence and I wonder if it went down well.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

You obviously met an incredible gap in the market. Just a small question, you mentioned a (inaudible) service?

JESSICA MAY:

We think you should pay for staff that are good and qualified. It is completely free for our candidates. If you want someone that is qualified who can step in and has done a great job and they have been vetted and we put them forward, you pay for that service.

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

Any more questions?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Fantastic presentation. Do you support people with intellectual disabilities?

JESSICA MAY:

We have in the past. It aims to place not too much in the place where the government has a lot of support for it, we don't stop anyone from signing up with the service and helping where we can but we do things where we can. It is more like master of your own destiny. If you need a lot of support, it might be better for you to go somewhere where they can give you that support because it is not something we offer.

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

We still have time for more questions if anyone has any more.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I just want to know about data, how many people you have supported.

JESSICA MAY:

We put 300 people into work. We have about 13,000 on our databases at the moment. We have about eight executive contracts. I think it advertised over 2000 jobs. All the statistics are on our website. One thing we wanted to do was be completely transparent.

I know with a lot of recruiters, you get paid a certain amount and you know they are charging, we have all the information on our website. All the statistics, numbers, what they pay, we just wanted it to be fair.

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

Maybe time for one more question. No? OK, I would like to thank Jessica for her presentation.

(Applause)

I would now like to call Evan Knowles up to the stage who will introduce the next speaker.

EVAN KNOWLES:

Good afternoon. My name is Evan, I am an accessibility consultant at UTS. It is a great pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Nas Campanella. Not only can she proudly say she is a graduate of UTS, but Nas has gone on to an experienced and accomplished career in news reading and journalism.

In doing so, she became the first blind newsreader to read and operate the studio herself and live to air. If you are a listener of Triple J or the ABC, you are perhaps familiar with Nas.

Doing some further research as well, I discovered she is a dedicated advocate. Travelling the world, sharing her knowledge by transferring the skills of people living with disabilities. I am very keen to hear her speak, not me. Please help me welcome her here today.

(Applause)

NAS CAMPANELLA:

Thank you, Evan, and thank you for asking me to speak today. I want to pay my respect to Elder's past, present and future on the land on which we meet.

As Evan mentioned, I’m a journalist for ABC and Triple J. It is a job I adore. I dreamt about it for a very long time as a kid and sometimes it is scary and stressful but for the most part it is fun and fast paced. I also happen to be totally blind.

I lost my vision when I was six months old when blood vessels burst in the back of my eyes, tearing my retinas away. Doctors could not explain why or what happened, simply putting it down to a rare abnormality. I spent the first few years of my life in and out of hospital having experimental procedures but nothing could be done to salvage my vision.

I can see some shadows, some light perception but nothing else. I started school at a school for students with intellectual disabilities. For the most part I was enjoying myself, I could learn how to write Braille, doing lessons, swimming and daily life living skills classes. It wasn't long until my parents were told to put me in mainstream school classes. They were worried. After going to a new school for a few days a week, I was given an itinerant support teacher, it was her job to make sure everything taught to me, taught to my peers was taught to me in a way that was accessible for someone with no vision.

Those first years at the new school where really difficult because of this new teacher. I was always a fast, creative, imaginative Braille writer but when it came to reading I really struggled. I would sit down at the dinner table with the Braille version in front of me and my parents had the printed version and I would try to follow along. But for some reason I was really struggling and that teacher would say things to my parents like, she is lazy, she needs to keep practising or stop making excuses for her.

Finally I was taken to a neurologist where I was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie-Tooth or CMT, it affects sensitivity in the hands, arms, legs and feet. I didn't have enough sensitivity in my fingertips to feel the Braille dots on the page. For anybody else it would have been a very daunting time to have a second diagnosis like that. But for me it was an important turning point. It showed me what incredible support could mean.

The first thing we did was get rid of that nasty teacher and the second thing we did was hire a new one. She changed everything. She introduced me to the use of a screen reading technology called JAWS. It is this robotic Americanised sounding voice that reads everything on the screen out loud. As I type, it scans and reads what I have typed. I use the computer through keystrokes rather than through a mouse.

She also introduced me to the use of audio books and taught the teachers at my school that any worksheets or anything that needed to be handed to the rest of the class had to be handed to her first to be transferred into electronic text so I could access it through JAWS on my computer. That technology took me from being one of the lowest performing students in my grade to the highest performing at the end of year 12. With a HSC and university entrance score of 95.75.

I was chuffed because it meant I could get into the university degree of my choice. I did a journalism degree at the University of Technology Sydney. It was the start of a new challenging time in my life. I had to learn how to get around using my cane, something I previously hated doing. Usually I would grab a friend's arm or my parents would drive me, now I had to travel around uni on my own, in and out of the city every day on the train.

But with support from the student services department, it was brilliant, I had people coming into university lectures and tutorials with me to make sure they could explain any graphs, or they converted any of the textbooks. When they couldn't convert textbooks into electronic text, for example my Italian textbooks, they provided one-on-one tutoring. I'm pretty sure I got one over the rest of the students in that case.

So while I was at university, full-time, I was also doing some part-time work for Vision Australia so I could make money and go travelling like everybody else did in the semester break. But I also did internships, unpaid internships for about 4 1/2 years all up because I started when I first graduated year 12, and then I continued until I finished university. I knew that looking for a job wasn't going to be easy. But I also knew that I needed more than just my degree at the end of it. I needed to show that I have skills, knowledge and experience to do the job.

So I did unpaid internships at radio stations, television networks, magazines, everything you can think of in Sydney. Doing everything from making coffee to cleaning out the cupboards and finally in the last few years, actually having articles published in major newspapers. By the end of my degree, I had a nice piece of paper but I also had a really long CV and a huge portfolio and pool of work.

I chose never to disclose my disability in a job application, for me, it wasn’t necessary because I did have the skills and knowledge and experience to do the job. What I didn't realise was how much discrimination I would face. I heard about this D word all the time but I did not think it would happen to me. The first time prospective employers would learn about my disability was when the interview panel saw me with my cane. Sometimes the reception was so hostile that I knew I would not get the job when I sat down. Sometimes they said, how can you be a journalist when you can't see? And we can't help you in the office.

There was hope and an absolute despair when I knew I was better than the person they had chosen but they didn't choose me because of my disability and there was nothing I could do about it. But after several months I was really lucky to get one of 10 cadetships at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. 10 cadetships, they asked me one thing, "what do you need to do your job like everybody else?" I started in 2011, I was in the Sydney newsroom learning how to be an online journalist. They provided JAWS on computers that I needed, they gave me training so I could orientate myself around the newsroom and the surrounding offices. And they made sure that I shadowed senior journalists for the first couple of months.

So I could work out how I was going to get out and about and be a reporter like everybody else. They discussed the pitfalls with me and came up with solutions of getting around. Basically the ABC did what every workplace should be doing for somebody with a disability. Asking them what they need to do the job like everybody else and providing it so they can.

At the end of that first year, the ABC offered me a full-time ongoing contract in Sydney and I said no. Everybody else in my cadet year was going out to do regional placements and I wanted the same opportunity. A week later they came to me with a new contract and said, you are off to Bega for 12 months. Again they provided all the tools I needed to work in a regional area with no friends or family or public transport.

After that year, I returned to Sydney for a job at Triple J. Every week I read the news to an audience of 2 million people. I love that I get to educate and entertain young audiences everywhere. But how the hell does somebody with vision impairment read the news, I hear you ask. That screen reading software, JAWS, has come to the workplace with me, it has been loaded onto a computer in the studio and I have had (inaudible). I scan through the stories using the arrows and keystrokes on the computer, and JAWS reads the story into my ears and I listen and I repeat what I hear.

It happens in nanoseconds. I can't cough or sneeze or anything, I need to keep up with JAWS completely. Because if I fall behind, it means I stuff up the news. So it is not the only thing I hear, I also have a clock telling me when to start and went to finish. Three minutes, no more and no less. I can also hear myself coming through the microphone and the little audio snippet I need to play during the bulletin.

I might say, the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, says whatever, and then I play it, I had to think about who the Prime Minister was today.

(Laughter)

So what I’m hearing in my headphones when you're sitting in your car or at home listening to me read the news, close your eyes and listen to this snippet of audio that Pete and Frank at the back will play. If they can get it working.

(Audio plays)

NAS CAMPANELLA:

Labour frontbencher has accused the Prime Minister of acting like a dictator, with threats from the opposition National authority, asking Parliament (inaudible). The government has threatened (inaudible).

(Reading news)

(Applause)

NAS CAMPANELLA:

Sometimes in life pretty amazing things happened and I had no idea I would get a job on Triple J and read the news. Apart from reading the news live to air, with vision impairment, the only one we have on the desk, I became one of the only people in the world to do that, but I also inadvertently became a disability activist.

I have been really lucky to get my paperwork from the NSW government in mentoring people with mental illness and other disabilities, helping them with everything from interviews, self-advocacy, public speaking. I also work with the Asia-Pacific region in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with them I worked at the Spinal Injury Association and at the workshops in public speaking, and I was fortunate enough to also meet some incredible women who use wheelchairs in rural Fiji.

They were struggling to make an income for their families and to be seen as more than just a burden to their families. There are still quite a lot of stigma around people with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region. We came up with a plan because these women were making incredible baskets, weaving beautiful clothes and had nowhere to sell them. We came up with a pop-up concept for them to be able to make their products and sell them to the wider community within Fiji.

I was really proud to be part of that process. One of the other proud moments for me was being asked to go and over the design and implementation of Disability Awareness Training program for the United Nations Development Program. The programs I helped develop have now been rolled out across the entire Asia-Pacific region at all the UND offices. I got to jump in a Red Cross car and go to rural Fiji were I helped assess damage done by Cyclone Winston several years ago and I could bring back some incredible stories about how people with disability made it out those cyclones alive and what needs to be done for people with disabilities in those emergency situations.

I was a regional broadcaster on some of the ABC's platforms, gaining more than 1 million listeners. A year ago, I headed back to Fiji in the capacity of journalist with the ABC and I was able to collect a number of stories about people with disabilities and bring them back and put together my very first television piece. Something that was broadcast on the 7 PM news. And something I never thought I would be able to do.

Apart from that, I am a businesswoman, public speaker, an MC and I'm really proud to say that years ago I didn't think I would ever be doing any of these things. And I feel really proud that I have been able to achieve so much and I really credit groups, lots of groups and individuals for my success. You never do it alone, there is always incredible support. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the student services department at UTS because these places like university and TAFE are where you learn how to be assertive and take care of yourself. Without their support I could not do that, and I would not be in the position I am today in order to take all the lessons and experiences that I have had and be able to help the people with disabilities coming through the system now, so they don't have to face such a tough time in the future.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

NAS CAMPANELLA:

If anybody has any questions, we have time for a couple, we have a roving mic going around, pop up your hand and Evan will come around, and just say who you are.

EVAN KNOWLES:

Hello, questions?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

(Inaudible) from Centre of Design. One question, when you thought about being a journalist, did you think you would end up in radio or were you thinking about print or was it just anything in the sector?

NAS CAMPANELLA:

For me it was always radio. For me it was something I gravitated towards as a kid. I listened to television but the radio was so accessible. It was on from the time I woke up and I turned it off just before I went to sleep. It was something I loved and the main platform where I started discovering the world around me and I love listening to people and music so radio was always where I wanted to be but I have done a lot of print and online stuff.

And you get to do a bit of everything.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, it is Minton from Victoria University. You have this amazing self-belief and it is incredibly infectious from out here in the audience to listen to that. How did you get that?

(Laughter)

When we talk about our students, I am a counsellor as well, what are some of those experiences you can provide to the people that you are working with that enabled that development?

NAS CAMPANELLA:

I will be the first to say that not every day is a day of self-belief. Only when they are good. But it is things like mentoring, people that have had struggles, not necessarily the same ones as me, ones you can relate to and gain knowledge about their coping mechanisms and what to do in certain situations, that has been really helpful for me over the years and I did that at school and also in my personal life and through uni. You would get connected with peer mentoring and I can't stress how important those relationships are.

Also, my family never wrapped me in cotton wool. They said, if you can't do it the same as everyone else, you will find a way. So that has made me a bit more resilient.

As curveballs are thrown at me, you figure out ways to manage those things. That is one up about having a few things go wrong.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, my name is Anna. I am from the Northern Territory, I am an NDCO hosted by Charles Darwin University. You have kind of answered the question I had but maybe there is more you would like to elaborate on, but my question was around what support at University did you find most useful?

NAS CAMPANELLA:

There was tutoring, one-on-one services. Tutoring helping me write essays. We know that changes from high school to university. Being able to be introduced to some of the academics and tutorial leaders early on, before the semester started was really good, talking through my needs, talking with them about what is expected in each tutorial in the class and letting them know as well that you can ask questions, you can talk to me about your concerns. Don't just think there is this activity we're going to do, I don’t know how she will do it but I'm too scared to ask.

I think so many people often wonder if they are going to say the wrong thing so it stops them from saying anything at all and that doesn't help anybody.

Having really good lines of communication is really important. The cane lessons for me were really good so I could get around independently, so it was important for me to do that so I was seen as just another student.

I didn't need someone ferrying me around from class to class. It is also good for people to have some sort of disability awareness training. They did it at the ABC when I first started and it was really helpful because there were some people that had never met anybody with a disability before.

They had no idea about the language that was important to use or not to use or how to help me without being patronising.

It doesn't matter to me if you have done it before, I think it is always good to have a refresher. I think it is important to understand that not many people have met someone with a disability or had anything to do with us. So often they do things that aren't necessarily right or politically correct but they don't know how to do it.

I always take the opportunity, if someone is guiding me around, explain to them, if they are trying to send me messages, put their hand on the back of my chair. That is a good way of teaching them but also getting what I want.

COMMENT FROM FLOOR:

Thanks, that was really useful and I wrote it all down.

EVAN KNOWLES:

One more question over here.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

My name is Alex from the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training. With a lot of your advocacy work, what was, how did you go about getting organisations to change the language around disability recruitment and education, those kinds of things?

NAS CAMPANELLA:

It is really hard. Language is one component of a really broad issue when it comes to employment and education around disability.

There is so much. There is changing attitudes. Changing the understanding. There are so many people who automatically put it in the too hard basket because it will be too expensive to make modifications or it will be too difficult to slot that person's needs or requirements into our workplace or our institution.

It all starts with conversations about what people need or how to work. People think it will be expensive and it is actually not that expensive to implement things for people with disability. That can then be used for everybody. I think language is just one very small part of that, a very important part, but I think with language, it is just about when you hear certain terms, telling people it is going to be inappropriate.

Or say they don't use that language anymore because of this reason. Giving them examples of what is more appropriate instead of just automatically chastising people. It is important to point out why it is wrong or might be seen as condescending or insensitive, giving them an opportunity of how and why they can change.

Once you have simple conversations with people and you give them concrete examples to go off, they see the need and they will change. Change happens slowly but it is happening.

EVAN KNOWLES:

Perhaps one more question?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Marion from DCU. I am getting the vibe that you have a clear setting direction for yourself and going for it but as a student coming into uni who is managing more, what sort of information would you have liked to have seen about the courses that are available?

NAS CAMPANELLA:

Do you mean in terms of support?

COMMENT FROM FLOOR:

There are ways still of coming into uni, information about the support services that could be information about, but for students who come in, having awaited on a particular course.

NAS CAMPANELLA:

What I would've liked to have seen was a bit more variety in the formats you get that information. Obviously you have handbooks and booklets, so seeing those in large print for people who need large print.

Seeing more of that online on a website that isn't clogged with images and refresh buttons. That would be nice. Also having access to counsellors or peers, I don't know what you call them but support people you can go to and talk about this is the end goal, these are my vague interests but I don't know what course to go with.

Sitting down and talking with someone about how does each course work and these are the ones I am interested in and how does it work? Are there exams, is it practical, is it theory?

Something I have struggled with finding is the right Masters to do. Each uni has huge booklets of information about each course but where do you even begin? It would be nice to go and see a bunch of people and a bunch of different universities or whatever and say this is what I want to get out of it but I don't know what course to do.

EVAN KNOWLES:

We have run out of time now but Nas has agreed to stick around for a little while during the break. I think everyone has found something positive to take out of the presentations today. Join me in a round of applause.

(Applause)

I think we have a 10 minute break before the concurrent sessions. Thank you.

(Break)

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

Hi, everyone, welcome back. I hope everybody enjoyed afternoon tea. So, we are about to commence plenary... Could I have everyone's attention please? Thank you, we are about to commence plenary session 5, and we have today Leanne Rodrigues speaking.

As a parent, regulator and practitioner in the field of inclusive education, Lorraine has advocated for families to pursue inclusive schooling options for their children. Lorraine has worked for 20 years supporting families of children and young people by providing advocacy and support for parents.

As a principal consultant for inclusive education, Lorraine continues to work in partnerships with families, and promote inclusion for all. Lorraine is also a provider on the NDIS. Lorraine's presentation today – NDIS, Making it happen: learning, living and leading.

(Applause)

LORRAINE RODRIGUES:

Hi, everyone. I would like to pay my respects to the Traditional Owners of the land, both past and present, and thank them for allowing me to share this presentation with you.

Throughout this presentation I use the plural form 'we,' 'us,' they,' and refer to our son who is an NDIS participant – my husband and myself who are his nominated representatives.

I most certainly have their permission to share our journey with you, with the hope that all stakeholders present here today – families, NDIS providers, participants and founders – give the NDIS and us and our families a wonderful opportunity to build a world that promotes equality, equity and the freedom to pursue our goals because our children deserve the best. And we are instruments of change.

The NDIS was introduced in the Eastern region in Victoria in November 2017. Our son was one of the few who received an early package in February 2017. As parents, we were looking forward to the much talked about NDIS with hope and optimism.

Over the years we have been very proactive and vigilant, advocating for the needs of our son which are complex and many. We made sure his individualised bespoke package was used effectively to promote his learning, health and well-being. Hence, we consider the NDIS to be no different in providing for his needs with choice and flexibility.

Sorry, I forgot the slides...

While I would like to say that, as parents, we have attended forums, discussions, conferences, and read comments made about the NDIS that highlights people's grievances with the scheme. Some of them being a lack of consultation, poor process, poor systems, lack of adequate training.

While not wanting to undermine or diminish the difficulties and challenges experienced, and still being experienced by some, including ourselves, we would like to say that it is true this onslaught of negativity, that we offer family were determined to make the Scheme work for our son, to use our experiences, our successes and challenges of the past to strive to seek change for the better.

The business consumer model of function in the individual autonomy of support and choice that we have experienced involved the whole gamut of procedures, which initially left us feeling perplexed and out of our depth.

The very jargon of terminologies such as 'plan management' 'providers' 'support coordination' 'financial intermediaries' 'in-kind funding' 'stated supports' – it looked like a new Apple product hit the market.

A marketplace where we must learn to transact with skills and entrepreneurial wisdom.

We all know that learning comes when we ask questions, pursue and persist for answers, challenge the language of those who write with a flair for policy, and ask those silly questions even if it appears trivial.

Having done that, by going back and spoken with the NDIS, requesting the Ombudsman's office for intervention and finally having all our questions answered face-to-face across the table with butchers paper and textas, we have to say we now have the confidence and freedom to self-manage, freedom to use our preferred support and exercise our choice when assisting our son to pursue the goals he has listed.

I last presented at the Pathways12 conference in Canberra, talking about my son's transition from school to university. Today he continues his learning, doing the associate Arts Degree at Deakin University, attempting one unit each trimester.

The NDIS has made it possible for him to attend university three days per week with support. He participates in class, learns online, works with groups, and engages with peers. His support staff help him to liaise with the disability liaison unit, accompanying him to meetings, coordinating his support needs, while he learns online for some of his units.

They help organise his administrative tasks such as class timetabling, putting his unit material together, and they also shadow shift with new staff to train them and understand their needs.

Looking back, gone are those days when I was constantly being called to take him home because staff found him difficult to work with. Attending numerous 'group meetings' having to listen to all those misdemeanours and gaps in learning. Gone are those deficit phase assessments which prove nothing as well is the useless behavioural support plans and individual learning plans that never worked.

The nature of the support he receives, the personalised learning and the positive attitudes of his staff, his tutors, and the liaison unit, has made it favourable for him to learn as he looks forward to going to university.

Looking ahead, it is reassuring to see a young man engaging with allied health staff, therapy assistants, who work as a team to help him improve his mobility, given his recent diagnosis of scoliosis and osteoporosis.

Using eye gaze technology to browse the internet and research information for his studies, work with his direct support staff, expressing his needs and wishes, being very competitive in striving for good grades on his units by interviewing and choosing his support staff who understand university life, and participating in tutorials, cracking a joke or two, eyeing a pretty student in class and walking towards his own destiny – all with the help of university mentors, tutors and the disability liaison unit staff.

What does it take? Prioritising his greatest needs, and considering which supports are imperative to meet those needs. As soon as we received his NDIS package we sat together and worked on those goals, putting short steps in place month by month.

We interviewed support staff – he devised the list of questions for the interview, and he would use his yes/no strip to tell me if it was a go-ahead or whether it wasn't.

We interviewed every carer and provider with a list he populated. He was interested to know who would provide continuity of service, who would form relationships with us, and who was there just for the job.

He wanted to work alongside support staff who would understand the learning management systems that communicated with him, so we advertised positions on university career noticeboards. We went through agencies, and we now have a team of support staff who are dedicated, committed and well-versed in his needs.

What did not work for us were university students who accompanied him sometimes, because they are highly mobile group this disrupted his need for stability and security.

We had to train support staff with seizure management training, eye gaze technology training, outdoor mobility training, shadow shifts and double support staff shifts because Cameron's need are complex.

When the support and training was there, staff felt comfortable, motivated and determined to work with him. None of this existed, nor was it available, during school years, and I thank the NDIS funding which is a blessing for us.

What does not work for us is support staff who are unable to commit for a year and who sees support shifts as plug-ins for casual and part-time work.

What works for us are working with a range of service providers. Funds are limited on the NDIS and you have to stretch your package for the entire year. So we shopped around, we looked for a price that was competitive, not compromising on quality and expertise of the service provider.

This has made us very discerning of whom we employ – the language, expertise and an inclusive culture when working with our son is what we appreciate the most.

When we do not know where to go or who is a better provider, we ask other parents, we ask other providers that we trust, and other participants. We meet people through conferences like these, forums, and discussion groups, disability expos, networking communities and recommendations from other Allied health therapists, always scouting around for mainstream providers that could restructure their services to suit our son's needs.

I have reviewed reports of the independent review body appointed by the Department of Health and Human Services to audit dividers which has helped me understand the level of accountability and monitoring that exists.

We need to be proactive and vigilant for all our children. Many of the providers we have brought on board are people we have met in the busy marketplace of mushrooming agencies and new small businesses.

This requires a resourcefulness and ingenuity that gives us the courage to question. After all, that is what it is about – individual choice and determination.

We have turned down many an organisation that we felt did not measure up against the human service standards of empowerment, access and engagement, participation and well-being.

We chose to self-manage our son's package because we knew our son's needs well. And we always ask him if we are on a different tangent.

Despite his seizures, hospital visits, falls and medications, his determination is living proof of the zest to pursue his goal. I firmly believe every participant and their family, if given the explanations, the motivation and resources to voice their need will be able to do so in no uncertain terms.

What has not worked is the misinformation, misinterpretation, and generalisations I have come across in social media, and through some service providers. It tends to tarnish the good work being done.

Barriers to inclusion have always been there, and they constantly crop up. But now there is an impetus to create a drive for change. It will get providers and businesses, both small and big, to re-look at the opportunities that exist, not just from a business/consumer model of functioning, but from a human rights space and moral/ethical perspectives also.

Participants and their families have needed to advocate endlessly for change and hopefully that will decrease. Participants and families can be drivers for change, demanding more mainstream supports.

Community networking and best services must be evidenced by best practice, and that is not about writing reports and billing us for consultations. Best practice is about coming up with new ways of structuring services.

It is about engaging with the University when challenges arise. Our son uses an adaptive tech room in the University library to allow for visual engagement on two monitors in order to connect his new app which he has with his NDIS funding, to allow for assessment output.

His wheelchair and gait trainer was ordered to address continued mobility issues, falls and risk which will help him and support staff to continue to attend university.

We are constantly engaged in training support staff and we are engaged in and being vigilant in both university and at home is important.

Learning will happen if health and well-being is looked after and vigilance is what keeps us prepared to predict. We know, come assessment time, seizures will become more frequent. We follow-up on medications and antiepileptic medication doses and review his diet and exercises. All of this is consistent with happiness and mental health and well-being.

I have a grave concern, I know what it takes to give Cameron a fair go at university and in the community. But I am concerned about the support families would need to get through this emotional minefield of services.

It was this concern that led me to start my own consultancy, so I could share the practical experiences gained with other participants and their families. Teaching them to be curious, question, seek second opinions and use their packages in the participant's best interests and use it effectively.

Many jobs are done by the NDIS. As a new service provider providing services, education support and direct support, now get to compete in an environment that must evidence the nature and quality of the services I provide. Making sure I meet and uphold the same standards I expect from my son.

Standards that promote his rights and adopt the strengths-based approach to service delivery. It has awakened the sense that as participants exercise choice and control, we, as providers, must stand out and be exceptional to be employed by participants.

Support coordinators have to look at providers that are skilled, with expertise and experience, and providers are going to have to be fair, equitable and transparent when they provide an integrated service. To see my son looking forward to going to university, to see how well his current support staff communicate with him gives him the motivation to express his ideas.

He has a list of 'isms' in his notebook. These are jokes he makes about his support staff and jokes that his support staff make about him, and it gets him into a cackle every time you read them aloud. The opportunity to work with other providers to change their own framework of service provision, and lastly, to work in collaboration as a team to improve the life of others is about making it happen.

Learning, living and leading every single day, one day at a time. On behalf of our family, I thank the NDIS, the many providers who work with us, our son's amazing support staff, and the community we live in for recognising that inclusion is a birthright. Being innovative is about being curious and ingenuity is about being resourceful when thinking of others before thinking of ourselves. Thank you.

(Applause)

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

Thank you very much for sharing your story and your experience with the NDIS. We have some time for questions. Any questions for Lorraine?

Just put your hand up. Thanks.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, Lorraine. Thank you. I was wondering about what sort of negotiation went on when you were trying to work out what supports NDIS would pay for your son to attend uni and what supports the Uni had to provide on their own.

LORRAINE RODRIGUES:

The NDIS does not provide staff to go into the Uni or classroom to work with Cameron. I had to go back on a decision, and this is the review that went on with the NDIS and the Ombudsman's office, that because Cameron had seizures that could happen at any point in time, he also had his wheelchair, his communication device, he needed staff to accompany him at all times so he did not place staff and students at university at risk and it didn't place his own single support staff at risk.

With that negotiation, I had to go back to the NDIS, section 34, under 'reasonable and necessary', and explain why it was Reasonable and necessary to request a support for him to attend.

He has equipment support through the NDIS. He has support staff that accompany him to university and back. He has many kinds of assistive technology in terms of ramps or the C-Pen Readers or the voice-to-text devices. Other technology was covered by NDIS.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thank you for that. You mentioned there was a lot of misinformation out in the open about the NDIS, certainly through a lot of social media posts I have seen as well as newspaper articles that have basically denigrated the struggles of the NDIS and how many providers are unable or unwilling to go the extra mile.

I suppose in your work, what have you been trying to do to combat that sort of misinformation?

LORRAINE RODRIGUES:

I have to say, I don't. I understand where the misinformation comes from. Initially when we were first given a package for Cameron, we were not consulted about that package. A lot of the information from the Disability Support Register got transferred to the NDIS and there was no conversation about what were his needs, where he was going with the package, no explanations.

It was that that lead me to write to the Ombudsman's office and say I need further clarification. Now I have that clarification and could talk about it face-to-face across the table, I can understand where the misinformation comes from.

On social media, people talk about challenges and difficulties with the NDIS. We have to remember that every individual's package and needs are so different. No two people's packages are the same.

And their needs are also not the same. So when you talk about the challenges you face, my challenges that I face would be completely different to another family whose needs and challenges are different.

For me, it also felt that when you need information about something, it is better to go right back to the NDIS, clarify it in writing, via email, knowing who you spoke to, when you spoke to them, because the number of people that I have spoken to from LACs to NDIS planners to just the call centre staff, sometimes the information can be so varied.

So I document that information all the time. To my own consultancy, now I am working as a support coordinator supporting 40 families on the NDIS, we sit with those families across the table, with the butchers paper and texta to explain what it all means. When families understand what it means and what they can buy with a package, where to cut short on things and how to…

A simple example, I used to have a physiotherapist for my son once a week. I now have him once in three months and I have taken fourth-year Bachelor of Physiotherapy students from La Trobe University to come home and work with him. He loves working with them because they are all uni students.

I have cut the cost of my physiotherapy package to suit Cameron's needs right to the end of the year. It is those sorts of things that we need to sit with parents and show them how it is done and what works and what is best for the participant in the long run.

I addressed that misinformation through my consultancy, working with families.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I just wanted to say I think it is really helpful to reflect as practitioners and I think we all do it. But just to recognise the journey that people have had before they get to university and how tenacious Lorraine and her family have had to be to get Cameron to the point of university, and the importance of that person is a central focus and the respectful relationships.

And what a valuable resource for families in being able to get to that point, so full credit to Lorraine and Cameron on that journey.

(Applause)

LORRAINE RODRIGUES:

I won't take credit for that because Lisa is none other than my son's disability liaison officer, and she is brilliant. I would not be standing at this podium today, being able to do what I do as a provider and a user had I not seen him so happy to go to university, so thank you, Lisa.

DAGMAR KMINIAK:

We still have time for questions.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thank you, Lorraine. I had a question for you because some of the journey that you shared really resonated with experiences that we have had with different students where the family might not have realised, and the student didn't realise, the extent of the package and just what it can cover.

We had parents driving students to university when there was a provision for transport in the package. And that it can cover not just the needs of getting to university but other activities as well.

What we found was for certain students in the first year, we might liaise with them to organise for the services to come on campus because for some students, it is going to be the equivalent of another subject, for them to do all that administrative work themselves.

And if their parents and family are not equipped or they don't have the language skills, and the financial literacy as well, they are not going to be able to do that.

There were actually two parts to my question. Reflecting on that, and now of course, in the second and third year of their studies, these students are taking it on and bringing up with their timetable and doing things for themselves so it is a capacity building exercise.

For the individual, with their package. What would your advice be to us as service providers and also to students and their families, both about that and also about having third-party providers come on campus? Because there have been concerns in some areas where we have people coming through the NDIS and not necessarily, as you said, sometimes they will shift and change and you don't know who is coming on a certain day.

If you have a carpark attached to a certain registration plate, that is a problem when it is a different person coming, or it changes every couple of days. What advice would you give for inducting and supporting and monitoring those different people coming onto campus as well?

LORRAINE RODRIGUES:

Good question. It was a lot of work first of all to choose carers and support staff who would accompany Cameron, and make a commitment to 12 months of working with him.

So, first of all, we do not chop and change with staff because that throws Cameron totally into meltdown.

Secondly, we always make sure that we let the University know who his support staff are going to be for the trimester. We make a point to get them to go and introduce themselves to the disability liaison unit so that they are identified and they have access to the campus.

I lecture at RMIT University as well and I do have students on the NDIS package, and what I do is sometimes many of them haven't got the understanding of what their package means and what it involves.

I make sure I refer them to the NDIS to get help with consultation on breaking down that package for them – their core supports, their capital support and their capacity building supports – to really understand that well enough to know what that involves.

From the perspective of the University I get students to sit with the family and the support coordinator to understand the brokerage systems involved. Whether they are self-managing, whether they are agency-managed, or part self and part NDIA-managed.

In terms of timetabling and parking, those are arrangements I make sure Cameron's support staff get right at the beginning of the trimester so there is no conflict.

But I have to say a lot of work goes on the back end of having rosters done, liaising with the agency that provides the support staff... My husband and myself to shatter shifts with support staff prior to the trimester beginning so that they know how to manage, not just the academic side of things, but even his personal care needs.

So, it is not an easy job but I know that the work comes both ways – from us as family – and I don't mind it because at the end of the day my son has finished six units at Deakin University with high distinctions and is enjoying working in the field, so it gives me joy to see him go to university.

And I basically talk to parents and say that it is not about how much work is involved, it is about seeing the joy on their faces to do what they can do.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

I would like to invite Caroline Krix to the stage he will introduce our next speaker.

CAROLINE KRIX:

Good afternoon, my name is Caroline, and I am the national disability coordination officer for the Western Sydney region, and it is my pleasure to introduce you today to Rhiannon Brodie and Chris Drimal from the NDIA.

Rhiannon Brodie has worked at the NDIA for the past 18 months in the community and mainstream engagement branch of the NDIA for the Sydney region. Her role oversees establishing and maintaining stakeholder relationships within the community and mainstream support, plus ensuring that as the Scheme rolls out there is good understanding of the NDIS and what is possible and how people can access the scheme.

Prior to working at the NDIA, Rhiannon worked in disability advocacy for more than five years. The NDIS is a significant reform providing an exciting opportunity for people with disability, and she is excited to be part of the journey.

As well, we have Chris Drimal. Chris works in the community and mainstream engagement branch of the NDIA. She holds the role of Regional Employment Champion for NSW Zone Central, including South West Sydney, Nepean Blue Mountains regions, and as far west as Broken Hill.

Chris has a long career of assisting people with disability and the workforce that supports them to achieve meaningful employment outcomes. Having held management positions in the Disability Employment Services and community participation spaces, Chris has a strong focus on person-centred systems and process development, and developing organisational capacity through change.

Without further ado, join me in welcoming Rhiannon and Chris to the stage please.

(Applause)

CHRIS DRIMAL:

Hello, everyone. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting, and I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present and emerging. And Elders from other communities who may be here today.

Thanks for having us here. We are really happy to be delivering a presentation to you all, my name is Chris and this is my colleague Rhiannon, and we work in the community and mainstream engagement state branch for the NDIA, and we will provide information today on the national rollout of the NDIS and the scheme to date.

The agency's commitment to assisting disciplines to achieve employment outcomes. And we will also give you some information on the participant pathway and the employment supports provided under the NDIS. And Rhiannon will cover the intersection between education and NDIS and how it can work together.

OK, so, obviously the NDIS allows us to move from a welfare model to an insurance-based model and a whole of life insurance-based model, so we are moving from block funding for service providers to a diverse and competitive market of providers, and individualised plans for people, and the right supports.

We are moving from minimal choice and control into an environment where participants do have that choice and control over the services and providers that they use.

And I guess services have been inconsistent across Australia, really, and we are moving to, I guess, a nationally consistent approach.

So, we are actually part-way through the transition at the moment, and thank you, Lorraine, for your presentation earlier. I totally acknowledge that it is a mammoth task transitioning to this new scheme.

So, the NDIS provides an insurance scheme for 23 million Australians. 4.8 million of those Australians will be people who identify as having a disability, and the NDIS funds information linkages and capacity building funding for supports within the community. 460,000 of those people are people that we would see as being participants of the Scheme.

So, I guess it is really important to understand the NDIS in the context of all of the other supports that we have in our life. So, there is community support – including peer supports, groups and communities, advocacy groups – and also informal supports we all share, our families and friends and informal support networks.

We also have other government services and mainstream supports. Education, justice, health and I guess it is all about maintaining that inclusive community and support for people with disabilities.

Then we have the NDIS and providers that also provide support.

To date 202,137 people have received individualised plans. 6656 children are receiving supports through the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention approach, and more than 60,000 Australians are receiving supports for the first time. So, we are really moving along quite steadily. NSW has fully transitioned to the scheme.

So I also wanted to provide you with an update in relation to the NDIS participant employment task force. We know that having a job brings greater economic independence and significant social and emotional benefits.

On 19 November this year the minister of Families and Social Services, Paul Fletcher MP, and assistant Minister for Social Services Housing and disability services, Sarah Henderson MP, announced the establishment of a participant employment task force for the NDIS.

The task force will be comprised of senior executive service staff in the department of social services and the NDIA, supported by officers from both agencies. And they will take a consultative approach and engaging with participants, providers and industry experts.

The task force will look at how participants in the NDIS are best supported to seek employment through the NDIS, and through existing mainstream services, such as Disability Employment Services or DES.

It will make sure employment is prioritised in the NDIS planning and plan review process. It will improve employment supports in participants' plans including greater use of existing employment services. And this also includes comprehensive training of LAC partners and planners which is taking place currently on employment supports and the importance of employment.

Other responsibilities include finalising pricing for employment supports to include supported employment aligning with the government's broader jobs agenda. It will be charged with improving communication on employment of NDIS participants, and finalising the NDIS participant employment strategy.

The taskforce will also ensure supported employment is successfully transitioned to the NDIS. It will examine ways to improve employment supports in the plans of participants, including enhancements to school employment supports – I will talk more about that in a minute.

And exploring NDIS employment supports that started earlier in the schooling career, so at working age. Establishing better links to DES, such as automatic eligibility for DES for NDIS participants, and removing barriers and assessments that disrupt the pathway between service systems.

We will also be finalising the price for employment supports under the NDIS to include supported employment, with sufficient flexibility for new providers of supports in consultation with the pricing reference group.

SPEAKER:

(Inaudible)

CHRIS DRIMAL:

No, this is it, we can send out further links, definitely. So the task force won't be responsible for the broader disability employment policy, such as DES or issues relating to wage tools and the Fair Work Commission. Its particular task is to iron out and resolve employment issues, creating a seamless pathway for participants and providers, with minimal administration.

The new task force will, I guess, in terms of the next steps, undertake a series of roundtable conversations nationally, and also some work including the disability employment task force, and the 2017/18 consultations on the future of supported employment.

So, we just wanted to provide some information on the participant pathway. The NDIA has recently undergone consultation with over 1000 participants and their families around their experience, right from the access point through to their plan build, and then utilising their packages.

As a result of that, the NDIA has developed a number of booklets which you can find on the website and the feedback we have received from that has been very positive. We have some, only a few, here today which you can grab out the front, but they are available on www.ndis.gov.au.

The first booklet here, I know some of you may be assisting people in accessing the NDIS.

Before Rhiannon talks about some of the supports available to young people or to people with a disability, it is really important they test eligibility and access to the Scheme.

In order to access the NDIS, people need to have a permanent disability, be under the age of 65, reside in Australia and live in an area where the NDIS is currently rolled out.

The first booklet here goes through that process, gives a lot of information on how to access the NDIS. It also gives some information at the end on what other government services are responsible for and what the NDIS is responsible for and the context. So some of the supports that are available.

In terms of assisting somebody with an access request, it is really important that person has a diagnosis of a disability but equally as important in the access request process is evidence of the functional impact of the person's disability.

When it comes to providing supporting evidence to the access request process, it is important that the evidence is recent, completed by a health professional relevant to the person's primary disability, confirms the primary disability and confirms the impact of disability on a number of functional domains.

Describes previous treatments and outcomes and future treatment options and expected outcomes.

The next booklet we have available is around planning. This one is a particularly greater booklet. I guess it runs through and is a good tool for participant's family or support members in preparing for a disability planning meeting.

It goes through a person's current support networks, allowing them to talk about themselves, their informal supports, any services they are currently using. It also has a section of a timeline of a person's day or week and what sort of supports that person might utilise during the week.

Then it allows somebody to look at their goals, their short-term, medium-term and longer-term goals to be able to walk into that planning meeting with confidence and that feeling of preparation.

The third booklet we have is around using your NDIS plan. It really talks a lot about the types of supports and tries to demystify any of the jargon that might be used in a plan or explain the wording that might be used.

It also talks about service agreements, choosing the provider that is right for you.

So Lorraine did talk earlier about section 34 of the Act. And decisions for all funded supports are made against the reasonable and necessary criteria. I wanted to run through what that criteria is.

A support needs to assist the participant to pursue their goals, objectives and aspirations. It needs to assist the participant's social and economic participation. It needs to represent value for money, be likely to be effective and beneficial for the participant, takes into account what is reasonable to expect families to provide, carers or informal networks or the community.

And it needs to be appropriate for the NDIS to fund or provide.

In addition to that, we have done some work, not only in the production of these booklets but the plan format itself.

And anybody who receives a new plan, I think it was at 1 November, you will be receiving the new planning format which is a lot easier to use, and to see what the funds are in the plan, and what they could potentially be used for.

In terms of employment pathways and supports. When it comes to the employment landscape, there are disability employment services that are not funded under the NDIS. They are in mainstream support.

Funded by the Department. DES providers tend to prepare people to prepare for employment when they look for work. When they gain work they can often provide post-placement support and assist the person to become independent in their job.

There is an independent pathway. Certainly, a lot of people may have connections and networks where they find a job with a family member and are supported that way.

There are other state-based community and employment programs such as the ADORS apprenticeship scheme. And then there are reasonable and necessary supports.

Last year, part of my role actually involves working quite closely with the Department of Education, particularly around school leavers.

Last year and in the preceding years, the Department of Education support transition teachers would complete what was called a functional capacity assessment for young people with a disability who are leaving school. The focus of that assessment was to determine the most appropriate post-school option for support for that young person.

The result of that assessment would indicate whether a person was eligible or suitable for disability employment services and that level of support, whether they were eligible for school-leaving employment supports.

School-leaving employment supports is the support funded under the NDIS. It acknowledges that some young people aren't ready when they leave school to move straight into employment. And they may require the development of skills, both hard and soft skills. So skills directly related to a particular job, as well as soft skills, communication, working with others, understanding the world of employment and what is involved in that.

School-leaving employment supports is a support provided and funded under the NDIS. It goes for up to two years after somebody has left school. Assisting them, we would expect a large cornerstone of school-leaving employment supports would be work experience in open employment settings to develop some of these skills - travel training, money handling.

Another support is supported employment or Australian Disability Enterprises which are commercially viable businesses that also provide a fully supported work environment to young people.

We also have community participation for those young people who may not be ready to be thinking about employment just yet but might require assistance to access their community. The functional capacity assessment was a state-based assessment, and school-leaving employment supports was based on a program formerly known as Transition to Work.

The problem with that was that the way of assessing young people was a state-based way, and we're looking for a nationally consistent approach to working out what a young person might need from leaving school into the adult world.

We have done a considerable amount of work with the Department of Education, understanding their transition in planning which can commence from Year 9, around work experience that a young person has attended and been through or involved in throughout their schooling, as well as any information that Education has to assist a young person or assist the planner to understand what supports would best suit a young person leaving school.

Rather than have a functional capacity assessment or a particular assessment, really, the young person can bring a raft of information from education, individual transition planning documents, to the planning appointment.

The other benefit is that the functional capacity assessment results were generally available to a young person right at the end of the year. Now, whenever their plan meeting falls due within a year, that transition can be factored in so it is a seamless transition.

Whether it is to an employment service directly or whether they want to pursue further education, tertiary education.

SPEAKER:

(Inaudible)

CHRIS DRIMAL:

The Local Area Coordinators certainly do hold those conversations and gather that information. It is around a delegate decision and delegates are planners within the NDIA who make the decision.

Also part of the participant pathway review is around that connection between the LAC partner who is conducting that information-gathering session and the planner who makes the decision on the supports.

Basically, if someone is going to a Local Area Coordinator to have that planning meeting and they are transitioning from school, then that information is certainly relevant and useful for that planning meeting.

I might hand over to Rhiannon to talk a bit about supports that are available and how we can work together.

RHIANNON BRODIE:

I just noticed the time. We will send further links to everything here today and obviously ask questions at the end. But really just to highlight, and I think Lorraine sharing her son's story highlighted the real importance that education employment, any sort of mainstream service, we need to be working together to ensure that this is a seamless experience for people with disability.

In the past, the state-based system, it has been, for a lot of people been a closed-door situation. “Not my department, I can't help you.” Here is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for people to be receiving funding for the reasonable and necessary supports and to be able to utilise that to access mainstream services.

However, the NDIS is not solely responsible for making our community inclusive. We all have a responsibility to be making the reasonable adjustments in whatever workplace we work in.

This is really critical in ensuring the NDIS is sustainable and continues to be sustainable for people with disability. On that basis, we did, prior to the NDIS, have the National Disability Strategy.

That was from 2010 to 2020. If you haven't heard about that, I highly recommend you read that and we will send you out the link. But that was the compass point for us in terms of how, in each of us in different services systems, had.

How can we make the lives of people with disability better. So they had access to the health system, justice, family support and education and housing.

Further to this, when the NDIS was introduced, the COAG set out in 2013 set of responsibilities for the NDIS and other systems such as the health system, child protection, education support and education and housing.

It highlighted the differences between mainstream services and specialised services and mainstream services are indispensable for participants of the scheme. In the rules of 2013, schedule one, this provides guidance to the sort of supports most funded under the NDIS and what other mainstream services are responsible for.

The NDIS is not intended to replace supports and services provided by other mainstream systems, such as school education or higher education and vocational education and training. Wherever possible, we assist participants to access these mainstream services, and that is a big part of the planning process.

In the LAC or the planner conducting an employment goal of having that capacity to either work or to further study is a really high priority. We look at all of our lives and what brings meaning and purpose, and how do we connect with people, having some sort of role is really important, and I think in the past for people with disability they haven't been enabled with that opportunity, or being asked about that opportunity.

The NDIS, with the task force on board, is making this a priority. And thinking about people's capacity, whatever that might be. So we will be looking at that, and as Chris mentioned we will be looking at seeing where could that person be able to access that sort of mainstream support. And then look at the functional impact of the disability, and what sort of funded supports the NDIS can help assist with.

As Lorraine mentioned, for Cameron it was around that personal care need to actually physically get to the university, which is incredible thinking that a lot of people didn't get supports before. Now they actually have that funded support to get them to that mainstream service. And that is then relying on that mainstream service to be accessible for that person.

So the principals determine whether the NDIS or other systems is more appropriate to fund particular supports, and it goes into high detail, the document, and I can send you the link if you haven't read it – the sorts of supports we expect the mainstream services to provide, and also other educational institutions.

I think Lorraine already highlighted a lot of this – about the NDIS being there to provide the functional aspects of some of the impact on someone where the education is there to provide the teaching and learning experience.

Again, it is also important and critical that we maintain relationships with mainstream services, and that is a lot of the work that Chris and I do, and our team on a daily basis – to inform and educate. We meet monthly with Education, and we have close relationships with the NDCO officers.

We are not at full rollout – 2020 is full rollout – so we get feedback, we change and adjust. As you know, it is a changing environment, and we are continuing learning and wanting to make this experience for everyone as seamless as possible.

And I think that is so important, those relationships, in understanding what is funded, and what is not funded, and perhaps there are gaps there as well that we need to look at about how we can become more inclusive.

So, I will just leave that here. Further to that, in NSW, in 2016, they decided that even on a lower level, we have a high-level mainstream services but systems such as justice and to some level health as well, there are different ways of doing things, they provided Operational Guidelines outlining who is responsible for what.

This document, though, because of the fast nature of change does provide some level of detail but always the legislation, the NDIS legislation and Operational Guidelines and rules, override any other documents for guidelines that may exist.

And that is an important thing to think about as well – that for the first time ever decisions on people's funded support that are reasonable and necessary, Lorraine articulated well that she was able to use the legislation to help demonstrate what was reasonable and necessary for her son, and I think that is a really great achievement for Australia, that these sorts of supports are legislated, and we do have some sort of framework, and that it is a fair and just process.

So that we can… You know, previously under state funded systems there was no sort of avenue to be able to determine who got supports and who didn't, so all decisions are made under the legislation, and we will provide further links in understanding that. But I think that is it. We have gone over time, do we have time for quick questions?

SPEAKER:

The microphone is going around, so if anybody has questions.

RHIANNON BRODIE:

Otherwise, Chris and I are happy to stay at the end and talk to people individually.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Sam, from Charles Sturt University. Lorraine's very amazing in what she has been able to negotiate, and how she has an advocating for her son. We deal with a significant number of parents without those skills and abilities.

I'm wondering how NDIS is coping with people who maybe do not know what to ask for, and what they need. And making sure people are, I suppose, getting provided with what they need to move forward.

RHIANNON BRODIE:

That is important – we do not have a slide on that. The NDIS recognises that capacity building is a huge area, and it will take a long time for people to feel comfortable in asking for what they want, and in how to navigate the system.

A few things that are happening in regards to that is that there is funding available under the information linkage and capacity building grants, and these have been rolled out now for the last three years.

Families and individuals can access them. Different organisations have put their hands up. Many are doing peer-to-peer networks in different areas about understanding your plan, and innovative ideas.

Part of the ILC is the LAC's role as well. The Local Area Coordinators have a role in building people's capacity, in understanding their plan, and if it isn't an LAC it is a funded support called support coordination.

They also have a role in building people's capacity and understanding their plan – these are funded supports that we need to ensure that people know that they can utilise them, and ask them about how to use their plan, or different providers out there, and linking them back to mainstream supports as well. That's a huge role of the LAC.

The referral pathways – we have a lot of work to go on those. And I think they recognise that it is a 0-10 year plan in getting people's capacity. We are seeing change. I have heard stories of people who had very traditional areas.

One story I think I told you, Chris, about a young man out in western Sydney who was not happy. For many years he worked in an employment environment where he wasn't being pushed along, he didn't feel he belonged, he did have a significant intellectual disability.

He told us he felt he was being pushed into a box, and he really wanted to get a job, just like his brothers and sisters did. And he said the NDIS has now… It took him a long time. For 40 years he had been working in the same employment service, and did not know how to say no, and that he wanted to move on.

Through having that connection, and somebody asking him about his life, he was able to make a decision that no, it is time to move on, and there was funded support. I think that is really important – it might be a slow journey for people, but hearing about other people's journeys and ideas it helps them to become better at making decisions.

But we fully recognise this will take time as well.

CHRIS DRIMAL:

And I think that the work done on the employment pathway, and making sure… Really, we're very concerned to listen to the feedback, and the experience of people, and to make it as easy as possible, and demystify the process as much as possible.

Another piece of work we have been doing with the Department of Education is actually going in and providing information to young people at the point of leaving school. But also to bring our LAC partners with us, to have those connections happen there so that that access request can be processed there and then. And people can really get the support that they need.

There are a number of different ways we are coming at it, but really our intention is to demystify the process, and make it as simple and straightforward as possible, whilst enabling people to develop their capacity.

CAROLINE KRIX:

We had better finish there. We are running a bit over time. I would love it if you could all join me in thanking Chris and Rhiannon today.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

Hey, everyone, how is it going? We are nearly at the end of the day. And we have a lovely meal to look forward to shortly, but we're going to do a bit of a wrapup of the day. If I can invite our chairs who are coming forward to do the wrap-ups of the various sessions they have been to today...

SPEAKER:

Thank you, what another great day at Pathways, I can't believe it is the end of the second day. Today started with an excellent plenary session that asked the question, do internships launch careers? And Suzanne Colbert spoke to us and told us through research undertaken, students engaged in internship opportunity had a higher success rate in gaining employment.

We then heard from Philip and Georgia who shared their experiences with the AND internships. It was very clear from both of them that students who undertake an internship, not only leads to employment opportunities but also in building the confidence of students throughout the process as well.

So then we had a lot of choice for the concurrent sessions. We had a lot of excellent sessions to choose from.

Manisha Amin from the Centre for design spoke about inclusive practices and talent management and outlined employment challenges for those with disability in relation to emerging trends in recruitment – things such as online testing and so forth, and how technology, as good as it can be, is disrupting the way that recruitment happens. So there are a few areas there to watch out for.

A key message from Manisha is how we think about diversity and inclusion, which are often clumped together but we do need to separate them, because it is about the unique experience of the individual. When we think about inclusion in the workplace, we think about does everybody have a seat and a say at the table.

Another breakout session focused on the conference theme of Gradwise partnerships, the collaboration between Wise Employment and Swinburne University, to improve employment outcomes for students with disability.

So this initiative recognises the gap, and it brings together the key stakeholders, so Wise Employment, the accessibility and careers teams within university, and students, to work together to further employment opportunities.

We are joined by Daniel Valente-Riedel, the general manager of JobAccess, whose humour and honesty was well received. He spoke about the role of JobAccess.

There is a lot of work to be done in the area of increasing participation of disability in the workforce.

At the end of the day, Natalie presented connectability, connecting through Pathways for tertiary training. It highlights early planning for a good transition. Natalie provided details around an inclusive on-campus experience for students in years 11 and 12.

Pre-empted by school engagement visits, and top priorities were identified surrounding students developing their familiarity of the campus, and meeting other students with disabilities who are enrolled on campus. So simple ways for us to support a smooth transition for students.

That was before lunchtime. Lloyd is going to talk about the other sessions.

LLOYD GRIS:

I will try not to be too long because I know most of us are fading but there was a number of concurrent sessions this morning. Concurrent session 14, we heard from Robert Lawson who is the Student Pathways advisor in the Department of Education.

He presented on the topic ‘transition from school to work/tertiary education for students with disabilities’ and provided an overview of international research carried out in the USA, UK and Ireland.

He engaged with staff and students from several schools within these countries to gather new knowledge and concepts from each of those different approaches to further inform the development of programs and resources here in Australian schools.

Robert outlined key points taken from his research including the importance of partnerships, career-related education and work-related skills that are to be embedded in the school curriculum.

Learning and practising skills in simulated work environments should be occurring before work experience. They should be clear pathways for learning, practising and preparation leading into work experience and the value of internships, which we are also learned about from AND.

Robert described the intention of this research is to further develop programs in Australian schools initially to be development to students in Years 7 and 10 and then expanded from K to 12 within the future.

Session 15 was teaching trauma-informed practices in trade teaching - optimising safety, accountability and active participation in VET. This was presented by Meredith Jackson.

She is working with students in the disability sector but realises that within the trade sector, they are working around construction and heavy machinery and mechanics and stuff, that there was an increasing trend with students with mental health and trauma, specifically post-traumatic stress disorder.

They realised mental health is an invisible disability and it has not quite often received the same empathy and consideration as those with physical disability. Someone who has depression is shown to have the same impact as someone with severe asthma or deafness.

Someone with PTSD has the same impact as someone who may have paraplegia. And someone with schizophrenia may have the same impact as someone with quadriplegia.

Factors that impact on workers are things such as alcohol and drugs, stigma, sleep deprivation and so forth.

It is also in this that they felt that training of staff within the mental health areas around supporting them and debunking myths and stereotypes regarding mental health, and also supporting staff who are feeling stressed and having to deal with the increase of mental health students and their workloads, mental health and so forth.

We then go on to session 16 which is USEP or University Student Employment Program. It is enhancing success for students with disabilities in graduate employment.

This was delivered by Gabrielle O’Brien and David Swain who services the North Queensland area. This was a pilot initiative built to deliver an on-campus employment service and it is a great example of the value of universities and key stakeholders collaborating together towards a common goal of connecting university students to graduate employment.

Continuing on to session 17, this was building a disability management system from the ground up, taking into consideration privacy, multiple user groups and record management principles.

How come I always get the long titles? This was delivered by Michelle Kerr. New South Wales University started developing their management system in 2013. This is a system that is fully supported by the university's internal IT systems.

The process which the system supports is accessed and touch points of various issues within the university. Its system is capable of sending out multiple academic support plans to all students. This in turn saves time, manual work time, paper, and this is also moving to a digitalised system. It also takes into account privacy and confidentiality considerations.

These were the areas I worked on. I will hand over to Petria.

PETRIA McGOLDRICK:

I know we're fading. Mine is pretty short. First one, the concurrent session speaking towards consistency which was visited by Lee Papworth from the University of Melbourne. Lee presented the unlikely match of having a team of disability advisers assessing applications for specialty consideration.

Lee asked, should specialty consideration exist? For Lee and the team there was a tension between person-centred approaches and a social model of disability and a document-driven model which is special consideration.

This presentation was thought-provoking about the role of disability advisors and the assessment practices at the University.

Concurrent session 18, which was Susannah Gregory from the University of Sydney, which spoke to transitioning students with Autism Spectrum Disorder into higher education.

The University of Sydney disability service highlighted a transition program for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

We are all aware of the growing population of students with ASD in the higher education sector and, for me, the experiences and practices that can be developed in this dynamic and fast-paced environment for this cohort of students. Susanna reminded us all that to know Autism is to not know Autism.

The individualised support program facilitated by Susanna has enabled a troubleshooting and goal-based support program that has assisted students to transition into university and engage with it effectively.

Programs highlighted the importance of reflecting on the diversity that is within a disability subgroup and how our models of support need to be responsive to the needs of the student, their challenges and goals, no matter how big or how small.

Comments from the room highlighted that a collaborative approach and a review of existing programs supporting students with ASD could evolve. Pathways20?

Finally, we had Manisha from the Centre for Inclusive Design presenting again on design inclusion. It was a very thought-provoking session.

A couple of quick points, there is no such thing as an average user. She gave some very good examples about where we assume, when you are doing your testing, what is average.

Inclusivity is often seen as an added cost rather than added benefit or value. She provided many valuable examples of being inclusive and a very good one, a very current one is the mobile phone. If you look at a mobile phone, they have a significant amount of features and yet each person uses some or all or none of those features, according to what they need themselves.

A good example, you have something that has been designed and people use what features work for them.

Another example she gave was in regards to course materials where the search function should be changed so it allows for a diverse search. For those people who want course material with the images involved, they are looking for the whole kit and caboodle, so to speak. If people just want the text, they can just find the text.

Taking the approach of there is no one way to search for something. Apart from the seven inclusive design principles she referenced three dimensions. Recognising diversity, and going to the edges to get it right, rather than looking through the middle.

The collaboration with users, as we spoke about before, and having diverse designers.

And everything is a complex and adaptive system that is constantly changing and is never perfect. Thank you.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

We're almost there. Speedy is going to come up and do a bit of housekeeping for us. And I would just ask a question, how many of you have noticed the interpreters? How many of you have been watching the interpreters? And learning a few words. I learned heaps today.

I would just like to thank the interpreters for the work they are doing.

(Applause)

Visually it is splendid to watch and it is fantastic for you to enhance the accessibility of our conference for everybody who was here, so thank you for being here and the work you are doing.

Now I am going to hand over to Speedy.

SPEEDY:

Thanks. I can see the energy levels in the room lowering significantly so I will be quick. You have about 2.5 hours so go and have a nanna nap and recharge.

The dinner is at 6:30. Sorry, that is part of my announcement. The gala dinner tonight, a three-course, sitdown meal. There is no seating plan. Free seating. Entertainment provided by musician Kevin Laso and the photo booth will be there as well.

Pre-dinner drinks in the grand ballroom foyer. Please bring dinner tickets which are located in the back of your tag holders.

There will be a silent auction and raffle tonight, credit card machines will be available and silent auction and raffle tickets will be bought and will be available throughout the dinner tonight and that is pretty much it from me.

SPEAKER:

One other addition is that the raffle tickets are cash only. So there is an ATM a few hundred metres around the corner so do come with your cash. There is one downstairs? Even closer. Do come with your cash money so we can take it all from you for the lovely raffle tickets.

We will see all at dinner here at 6:30.

(Applause)

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