ANTHONY:

Good morning, everyone. Morning! How are our superheroes going today? Which of them have a sore head? They are not here, that is why!

I'm noticing that none of my team are in the room yet. And I saw a certain bottle of Chivas up here at some point in the night. I'm sure they'll be here at some point.

I was sitting on the beach this morning – anyone notice how lovely, healing and relaxing it is to be near the water? Who wants to say here? But you go home to it, that is nice. I don't.

We have a lovely agenda packed full of wonderful things this morning, and amongst the many presentations today is my favourite – one of my Swinburne students, Tom, will be here with his family talking about what it is like to have schizophrenia as a student. A very powerful presentation. Please stick around for that – the last of the day – perhaps the most important for the whole three days.

Rick will do housekeeping now.

RICK:

Before I tell you that the toilets are outside on ground level, and that if you hear an evacuation alarm to move downstairs in an orderly fashion and wait outside, and that the Novotel is a smoke-free environment so if you want to smoke please do so outside. We have hearing loops, Auslan interpreters and closed captioning as well. And you can follow us on social media at #Pathways14, and I will let you know that the TAFE NSW consultants are meeting at morning tea, so if you can all meet downstairs in the lobby, that would be great.

And have a wonderful morning,and soak it all up. Thank you.

ANTHONY:

And when Rick says the toilets are outside, he means in the foyer, not on the nature strip!

(Laughter)

It's OK, I'm just a nobody. No problem. It is my extreme pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Mr Brent Phillips who will talk about the shortage of Auslan interpreters,and understanding the national shortage. A bit about Brent – currently the director of Language, Partnerships & Innovation at Expression Australia, leading Expression Australia's community engagement and partnerships strategy, as well as Victoria's and Tasmania's largest and most experienced Auslan interpreting agency, Auslan Connections.

Brent is also responsible for driving Expression Australia's suite of learning and training services. His previous roles include contract manager at the Department of Planning and Community Development, disability outreach officer at the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, and manager at Deaf Victoria.

He is a former president of Deaf Sports Australia, a voluntary position he held for eight years. Brent is currently co-chair of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Disability Reference Group, and he is a third generation Deaf person in his family, married to a Deaf person, and the proud father of two young children. He has a BA in criminology, and an MBA, and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Please welcome him to the stage.

BRENT PHILLIPS:

Thank you for the introduction, Lloyd.

I want to congratulate you on being here this morning. It is not easy to arrive so early, so thank you for being here today.

I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, and Elders, past, present and future. We acknowledge also the work that you do in the everyday lives of people with disabilities to make their life better.

Sitting at the conference dinner last night I was really blown away by the true value of the contribution that you will make. The quiet work that you do behind-the-scenes fighting the good fight and advocating so that each of your students have a better quality of education. That is something to be congratulated.

I have a lot of experience at universities myself – I have been to three different universities and have also worked at two universities.

When I think about my time at university, some 20 years ago now, I had to pick between interpreting support and note takers. I was not in a position to be able to choose both. Snap to 20 years later, and now a student is able to access all the support they need, be that interpreters, note takers or captioning, but that is not the end.

There are still limitations and barriers. We are currently facing a national shortage of Auslan interpreters. Half an hour is really not enough to fully explore this, but I wanted to give you a snapshot today of the situation, and what plans we currently have to resolve it. And also what each of you can do to help support resolving this issue.

So, a quick summary of my organisation, Expression Australia. We were previously named Vicdeaf and we merged with the Tasmanian Deaf Society, and our services started to move across the country, so we established a new brand, Expression Australia, and we focus on Deaf and hard of hearing Australians. Our mission is to make sure that their everyday lives are full and equal to those in the wider community from birth until death.

Expression Australia has an interpreter branch called Auslan Connections – that is a national not-for-profit organisation, joint-venture between Expression Australia and Deaf Services in Queensland, and our zone is across the country. We are the largest not-for-profit company in Australia.

The money from revenue is fully invested back into the interpreting and Deaf community.

I'm sure you will know – a quick summary – Auslan is the national language of the Australian Deaf community, its official language. It is different to English, it has different grammar, syntax, and a range of other lexical features, and it is unique to Australia. Other countries each have their own sign languages, and Auslan is ours.

Deaf community. People are part of the Deaf community, they are usually signing Deaf people born to signing Deaf parents. Or they are hearing-impaired people born to hearing parents who later acquire Auslan or a sign language. They align themselves to ethnic groups such as the Italian community or the Greek community because they have a culturally and linguistically diverse group.

So we identify as similar to those CALD communities. But we're forced to comply with the disability structure, and use that branding of disability in order to receive services. But we are also a CALD community. Our behaviour and community connections are very much aligned to those ethnic groups, so we ride the fence between the two definitions.

Interpreting is not an easy job, it is highly complex. Interpreters move between two languages – Auslan and English. They break down the key components of the language where they are receiving the message, and then they reconstruct that in the language that the user requires. It is a very highly professional and complex role, so we acknowledge the interpreters here, and the interpreters who work around the country – they truly do an amazing job.

I wanted to give you a quick summary of the data that we have on Auslan users in Australia. These numbers come from the 2016 Census.

You will see the number of Auslan users compared to the number of the general population. There is just under 12,000 Auslan users encapsulated in this data. We believe that number is low because of the way the data was structured, the way that the census captured the information. We believe most people ticked English because Auslan was not an option. In order to tick Auslan you had to tick 'other' and then write out Auslan. We believe it is not a true representation of the number of Auslan users as it is a misrepresentation, a lower number.

And when you also consider an Auslan user's family, neighbours, and all the other people that learn to sign around them, that number grows even greater.

The benefits of having interpreting services are extensive. It increases access to employment, education, you can better develop bonds and relationships, a building of self-identity, self-worth, belonging, confidence, it means a Deaf person does not need to be reliant on their family or friends or goodhearted volunteers to provide them with communication access. And also the mainstream community becomes more aware of Auslan as a language, more aware about providing accessibility and information.

There is a lot of benefits in providing interpreters. Without interpreters, the future is quite different. It has a profound impact on a Deaf person if they don't have access to Auslan interpreters. And the spectrum of the impact can vary from mild to life-threatening. And there is a continuum that moves between.

The situation could involve a medical or hospital emergency, police investigation, and I am sure you can understand that not having an interpreter in that environment can be quite serious. And so the provision of interpreters is truly critical.

This year, Expression Australia partnered with the Victorian Government to undertake a research project. The project was concerned with the supply and demand of Auslan interpreters in Victoria. And this is the report. It is publicly available and I am happy to give you all access to that and send you the information. It was an extensive look at the current situation, across Victoria, and all interpreting agencies supplied the data.

I want to acknowledge Auslan Services, NABS, Echo Interpreting, who all willingly shared their data in order to provide a full picture of the interpreting landscape in Victoria.

There were lots of recommendations given in this report that give us a better platform in order to advocate for more funding for provisional interpreters. I am happy to make that available to you all. Please get in contact with me so I can share you a link to the resource.

Some of the data that is more relevant to all of you today is that almost half of all interpreter usage in Australia occurs in the educational setting - TAFEs, universities, schools, early education for young children in preschools. It is a big job, massive.

And it really should be that way. Education is important to establish a good foundation for a Deaf person that will stay with them throughout their life. Access to education in the education space is vital.

Unable to Service or 'UTS'. This is becoming more and more prevalent. Across the last three years we have seen a steady increase in assignments that we have been unable to procure an interpreter for. Our interpreters, with respect, are also getting older and older. There is not enough new interpreters coming up.

This creates a concern for our ageing workforce when we don't have the new interpreters being trained to come through the pipeline and take their place. It is really, really hard to retain interpreters. Through the report, we found that almost 40% of interpreters stated that they plan to leave the profession in the next 1-6 years. In Victoria, that means that we would lose 16 interpreters per annum. And I can tell you we're not getting 16 new interpreters each year.

The reasons that interpreters stated for wanting to leave the profession varied. One being job security, one being physical injuries such as occupational overuse syndrome, the isolation of the work. Sometimes interpreters find themselves working in quite difficult situations with sensitive information, in hospitals and police stations, and they may not find they have the support to manage themselves. There is a limited opportunity for career progression. There is not a clear pathway for where they can further progress their skills and education. And also a lack of reward and recognition.

And then we have the wonderful NDIS. It is amazing for the Deaf community and that can't be understated. I have an NDIS package myself, and that includes funding for interpreters. I can now book interpreters for my children's swimming lessons, my auntie's 50th birthday party, Christmas Day, it is wonderful.

If you think about 12,000 Deaf Australians, or more, each getting funds to use social interpreting, that then compounds the situation that we currently find ourselves in with the lack of interpreters. This needs to be a national project to find a solution, because it is a national impact.

The NDIS has seen many interpreters set up their own businesses as sole traders, or leave the interpreting profession to join the NDIA and take up roles such as planners or in-house interpreters. This has taken the interpreters that we had outside of the community work they had been doing.

So it's a conflicting issue. We have a program designed to supply more interpreters and to increase the access to interpreters, but the impact is that more interpreters are leaving the profession and the community work.

So, is the future positive, negative? Well, both. It's a hard time that we find ourselves in currently. It is not easy. And it is not going to get better in next few years. But we do have a plan. There is action taking place, there are programs being established, that will see results in the mid-to long-term. This issue cannot be left to the Deaf societies to resolve. We can't expect the Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association to take the reins and fix it for us. We need to work together.

I will outline a few examples of what we're doing now to amend the situation. In Victoria and South Australia, we have a pilot program for an interpreting course which is targeting native Auslan users. These are people who were born in a family with Deaf parents, use Auslan as their first language. We have developed a course that is uniquely structured to them. They already have an understanding of community, an understanding of culture, and we just need to refine their interpreting skills.

So we currently have two groups, one in Adelaide and one in Melbourne, who are currently undertaking this course. There are 30 students involved. We hope that next year that will translate to more qualified interpreters. This we'll then look to replicate in other states such as Brisbane. At the moment it is in its pilot stage.

We also see Deaf Societies around the country now offering more flexible ways of working as interpreters. It was previously a freelance model, but now we're seeing contracts being offered with a travel allowance to interpreters, we pay a communication allowance, we provide funds for them to attend professional development training, whether it be a half day or full day, we are using different strategies to increase the retention of interpreters in the field.

We encourage interpreters to specialise in different arenas, such as mental health, police interpreting, or legal work. We encourage them to best match what their aptitude for work is.

We are also promoting Auslan as a genuine career pathway. We are looking to increase promotion of Auslan as a career. Because at the moment, people are attending Auslan classes with the goal of learning Auslan, and it ends there. And it's not until they start the course that they realise it is a genuine career path. So we need to start promoting this earlier in schools and in kindergartens and in classrooms as a long-term career pathway. We also want to better support our current interpreters, provide them with better incentives, monetary, provision of work development, and flexibility of working arrangements.

And this is the same all over Australia - people love to learn Auslan now, and that is fantastic. In Victoria, schools are providing Auslan in the classrooms. It is now the fifth most highly taught language out of 50 languages in classrooms. And the problem now that we find ourselves in is that we don't have enough teachers to teach the course, but that's a separate issue.

People are seeing interpreters more prominently in mainstream media for natural disasters and emergencies, floods, fires. They are being included in the pictures of news reports, which is really great, and does increase awareness for the mainstream community and increase the familiarity and recognition of Auslan as a language and its importance.

At Expression Australia we have a 450% increase in applications to undertake Auslan courses and our interpreting booking requests have doubled. We are working closely with the Victorian Government to deliver Auslan from kindergarten right through to high school and university to strengthen the pathway of acquiring Auslan as a language.

I want to give you now some points that you can all think about and take into your jobs and things that you can do.

It is not enough just to book an interpreter. You have a role to play in celebrating Auslan as a language. To ensure the visibility of Auslan and the appreciation of it. Celebrate it at your university campuses and your TAFEs, celebrate the International Day of Sign Languages are celebrate the National Week of Deaf People. The more people in your institutes understand and appreciate Auslan, the better.

And like I said, half of the employment of Auslan interpreters occurs in the educational sector - you are the biggest employer of Auslan interpreters. So I would like you all to consider what role you play in supporting the interpreters.

Employ and attract new interpreters, support those practitioners. If you have a funding program related to research, or workforce development, talk with us, approach us, we want to partner with you all. We want to work together to grow and support our interpreting workforce. If you don't invest, then you won't have interpreters to service your students. It is a shared problem.

I also encourage you all to continue putting the students at the centre of your decision-making. Make sure that you are giving your Deaf students a safe place to talk about their needs, to talk about their support requirements. Do that from the start. I'm sure you all do a fantastic job of this anyway, but I am just hoping to serve as a reminder to ensure that you continue having the student at the centre of all you do.

You will know that it is important to have a consistent interpreter throughout the entire subject the student is undertaking for the semester. This increases the confidence of the interpretation, the bond with the Deaf student and understanding the subject matter better, and therefore the quality of the work produced will increase.

Sometimes Deaf people can be seen as fussy or choosy with their interpreters, and that is for good reason – they need to have the best possible linguistic match. It is really important that their language is on par with the student, that they develop a good rapport, that they get to know the student. Perhaps if they know the student personally – the Deaf community is very small – perhaps the student will be uncomfortable having them in the class, so you do need to be respectful of the Deaf student's requests in that case.

We also need to recognise the booking officers and the critical role that they play. Obviously, they will try their best to secure an interpreter for your university request or your education request, but they also will then hang up and take another phone call from a police officer, from a hospital, from other emergencies that require immediate interpretation.

So there is often a lot of criticism aimed at those booking officers but we need to recognise that they have a truly difficult job. We need to recognise the work that they do and know that they are allies, not your enemies, they want to work with you. They also need to work with Deaf people. It is a truly complex job.

Access does not equate to full inclusion. Booking an interpreter alone is not enough. We need to consider Deaf awareness training, consider the interpreter training, and provide the teacher in the classroom with support to deliver a course and a unit and lesson plans that are cognisant that it will be delivered in two languages, and encourage the teachers to work as a team with their interpreter. And remember not all interpreters love the education sector. Some love tertiary education and some hate it.

Encourage your teachers to work as a team with their interpreters in the classroom, and plan in advance. That is really critical. And it is possible that a Deaf person will change their mind – they will enrol in one course and at the sixth-hour change and choose another one – and we know that makes your job harder. But as much and as far as you can, plan in advance. That helps the agency and increases the chances that they will be able to secure the same interpreter throughout the course, which will increase and have an impact on the quality of the access provided to that Deaf student.

And we know and accept that it is not always possible to book an interpreter. Those unable to service bookings are becoming more prevalent, so other viable options are live captioning, notetaking, recording the lecture, and providing one-on-one tutoring.

When you do opt to record a lecture, there are options to have an interpreter sit with the student after the fact and interpret the lecture privately. It is not always the best case scenario but it is another option that can be considered. We have to consider the costs, consider the time it takes, and consider the options available to us.

Again, keep the student at the centre of everything that you do. Make sure that you have a good and respectful relationship with your student. Check in with them regularly around the quality of the interpreters that they have been having in the classrooms to ensure that the process is good and there access is of quality.

OK, that brings us to the end of my presentation today. We have time now for some questions. After today I will be flying back to Melbourne, so I provided my email address on screen here for you. You're welcome to contact me anytime or send an email and I will send you this report we had on aspects that affect you about today.

I hope I have been able to answer some of your questions. I'm sorry I haven't got the perfect answer that will help us immediately, but we do have long-term strategies we are employing, and the key message here is to work together with all stakeholders on this issue. Thank you.

(Applause)

LLOYD GRIS:

Any questions for Brent?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I am Kirsten from Adelaide. I am wondering if there is research at the moment into AI doing interpreting instead of humans? Is that happening in the sector?

BRENT PHILLIPS:

Yes, it is a very new emerging space. We have seen some trials that look somewhat promising, most of which are occurring in America and in Europe. But I'm sure, perhaps in 20 years we will see it further refined and it will provide a more perfect interpretation but it does lack some of the visual vernacular, the facial expression, the body language. One word does not always perfectly map to one sign. It's a technology that needs to be developed, and it is a fast-moving space, so there is hope for the future, but I do not think it gives an answer for today. There needs to be research and a lot of testing, and we're not quite there yet.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thank you for your presentation, Brent. The pilot program you mentioned that native Auslan speakers use, will that be extended to other states?

BRENT PHILLIPS:

Hopefully – currently we are in the pilot phase in South Australia and Victoria only but NAATI have endorsed and supported this program, but it is in the pilot phase. When both programs have been completed and we have been able to evaluate how they went, there is hope it will be offered in other states.

The course designers need to meet with different groups to find out what their experiences have been by undertaking the course. So there is hope that next year we will know whether it was a success, and if so, then it will roll out across Australia. So watch this space.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I am from Murdoch University, and I have two quick questions. The first one is for those interpreters who are working privately or independently, what is the public liability or personal liability regarding personal safety or even for the clients, are there any guidelines on that? When we book through an agency, I know that the agency has their guidelines, however, private operators....

My other question is have you had evidence or thoughts on disability advisors having some basic Auslan interpreting awareness or ability?

BRENT PHILLIPS:

OK, so to answer the first question, it is a new space, especially with the NDIS. We are seeing more and more interpreters establishing their own sole trader businesses, and the risk there is high. We need to make sure that interpreters have insurance and with an appropriate level of coverage, and we need there to be someone to oversee that, to monitor and to check the work that is being done.

In Victoria, in the hospital space, Deaf people are starting to book their own interpreters and bring them to the hospital with them by using their NDIS package, but the NDIS Act says that is not to occur. But we are finding that Deaf consumers are wanting the choice and control to select and pay their own interpreters, they want to negotiate the fees – they will pay the $100 in order to accompany them to the appointment and then the hospital staff interpreter will attend the same appointment and then there are two practitioners looking to provide interpreting services.

There is a fast evolving space, lots of changes are happening and there is an inherent risk there. Yes. We do encourage people to book through agencies always for peace of mind, it can have a higher cost that it does have a much lower risk.

In the next 1-3 years, we will learn more about the silo interpreters working, the sole traders, whether that model is positive or negative. At the moment, the current opinion is that it is too risky. And what was your second question – can you remind me?

SPEAKER:

Advisors having basic Auslan... Disability advisors having basic Auslan interpreting skills. I'm just interested in your comments and thoughts.

BRENT PHILLIPS:

Wow... I think that that could pose a conflict of interest. The disability adviser, are you saying also to provide interpreting? Look, I think it is great if disability advisors can sign in order to have a direct rapport and communication with the Deaf student, but to then also interpret, I think that could conflict your role. You would be tasked with providing communication support, but then if there were any issues with the access you are providing then you are then tasked with resolving that, so that could be sticky.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Lee Papworth here to add to that from the perspective of the University of Melbourne. I think it is really important when we consider skill development as advisers and learning some Auslan that we are not actually going to become interpreters overnight.

So, for some students who might be in an intensive course situation with 50 or even 80 students together, we have been providing Auslan classes to that student cohort and the teaching staff.

That doesn't negate the need for professional Auslan interpreter services in the classroom. Let's not forget that. What it means is we're recognising that in the social spaces between classes, when other students are saying, "Let's go and get a coffee," or "Have you seen the exhibition on at the National Gallery, it's great, let's go and see it together," they can have those basic social interactions. And some people might learn Auslan, as Brent was saying, to the extent they follow it as a career pathway.

But it is like taking a travel class in Spanish to go to Spain for a holiday – you will not become an accredited interpreter through the grace of a six-week course. So let's keep encouraging people to become aware of Auslan, to use it, learn it and celebrate it and recognise the professional accreditation and ongoing professional development needed in the interpreting field.

BRENT PHILLIPS:

Yes, and I very much echo those thoughts. Thank you.

LLOYD GRIS:

Unfortunately we are out of time. We could be sitting here for the next couple of hours discussing this topic, and nutting it out. Are you hanging around for morning tea?

BRENT PHILLIPS:

I could stay for another 15-20 minutes and can talk to you. But then I need to rush off to catch a plane. Please contact me with the details on the screen, it is really important that we begin open dialogue today, and that they are ongoing so that we can work together to resolve this issue.

LLOYD GRIS:

Please, once again, thank Brent for being here today. Thank you.

(Applause)

I won't forget, Jack will be presenting now, our next speaker. I would like to call Jack up to do our next presentation.

JACK CRANE:

Thanks Lloyd and thanks Brent. We will soon hear from Matthew Wilkinson. He will speak about a very important topic, which continues to be so. We have heard of it either mention specifically or have heard it mentioned in presentations which are not specifically on disclosure. It is something that every day we must grapple with when registering students – how much information we share about them, and how much information they want to share about themselves as well. It is a really deeply personal discussion. Something highlighted by Trevor as well last night, which I think will be really interesting.

I will let Matthew give a good introduction of his background. And thank you very much.

(Applause)

MATTHEW WILKINSON:

Hi, everyone, as you already know my name is Matt. Unfortunately my colleagues, Rita and Colin, could not be here. Colin is working at another conference right now and Rita is working hard on her holiday in Europe. So you have my company.

I am here to talk to you about a problem which is growing a lot in Australia's tertiary sector. It's a common problem, and a very well-hidden problem. Quite invisible. First of all, I want to try something new. Let see if it works.

How many people do we think are in this room? 150? 200? A little less. Take a look around, your colleagues, your peers, your friends, maybe enemies, or not… OK, how many of these people are living with a visible physical disability? A few, right? What about a cognitive disability? What about a sensory disability? What about an intellectual disability? How do you know? How many of the people around you are from a disadvantaged background to the point that it might affect their performance?

How many people suffer from financial difficulties? How many might struggle communicating in English? And how do you know?

Let's take this 200 people around us, what if that was 1000 people? Does that seem complicated right now? A difficult task? What about 10,000? Or 100,000? What if this room was just under 1.5 million people? And you are tasked with finding out who needed assistance, who needed accommodation, how do you know?

As soon as those people with their hand up disclose, that becomes a bit easier. But how do you know that everyone is comfortable doing that? That was the task that our research, or the problem our research thought to unravel.

In Australia's tertiary sector, which at last count in 2016 was just under 1.5 million students and growing, how many of those students fall into six equity categories? Three of which we chose from. How do they tell us that they fall into those categories? That they have rights to accommodations? Who is not telling us and why not?

It's a big task. So, as I said, 1.4 million students in Australia is tertiary sector, the estimate is next year it will pass 1.5 million. Some groups were handed to us by the federal government. Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, students living with disabilities, and Indigenous students.

And if we look at the numbers up here we can already see. Of those that can't see, I have to get a bit closer so I can, about 2.9% of the university population is from non-English speaking backgrounds. And yet, 27% of Australia's population, general population, is from non-English speaking backgrounds. Likewise, students with disabilities. 4.5% of the student population lives with a disability of some sort, whether visible or invisible. 18.5% of Australia's general population live with some disability.

People with Indigenous backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 1.3% of the population at university. And yet over double that in the general population. We suggest that either a lot less students from diverse backgrounds are coming to universities or a lot of students are not putting their hand up and disclosing.

In and of itself that is not really a problem. You have a right to not disclose. But if these students are seeking accommodations and don't know where to come to get those, that is a problem. In total we are looking at a population of 120,000 students that we know of.

We did this through four research questions. How many of the students are in equity groups not disclosing? How do students that have disclosed disclose? Where are they coming to tell us that they need assistance with this? Have they a right to this sort of accommodation? Why are students not disclosing? And are there ways to improve rates of disclosure? Are there ways to make it easier to put your hand up if you want to disclose?

We did this with a pretty simple methodology. We surveyed over 1000 students at 35 universities. We surveyed 130 members of staff at 29 universities. And with 258 extensive in-depth interviews either face-to-face or over the phone. In cases that we needed interpreters, we had those come in as well.

And what did we find? The results were actually pretty shocking. We found that 12% of students that identified as having a disability had actually told the institution about it. We found 6% of Indigenous students had not told the institution, and 18% of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. So on average, 11% of students who have a right to these accommodations and fit these equity groups are not telling their institution. So that 120,000 student figure has now blown out to about 134,000 students. And 11% of those are not receiving the assistance or accommodations that they have a right to.

The next question is, well then how do they disclose it? This is where it gets very interesting.

We see on the spider graph that students are disclosing in different ways. What it does not show is that it's at different times. We see students with disabilities overwhelmingly disclose to a register unit. That is, that they don't tell us on admission that they are living with disability, instead, they come to us later on. Typically at a crisis point when they really need our assistance. Often it's during exam periods before they consider dropping out of university altogether.

Different to that, a lot of the speaking-background students are often unsure whether they have disclosed or not. They do not know. There are forms coming here, going there, they don't know which boxes they have ticked. And by the time they have started university, they don't know on paper what they have told us.

Why are students not disclosing? This is very interesting. Because despite the differences of how they disclose, when students don't disclose it is often for the same reasons. Overwhelmingly, they fear prejudice in their professional life after university if they disclose. They're worried that if they put something down on paper, it will come back to bite them later on.

They don't wish to be labelled. Students don't want to be a token student. A lot of students do trust the university with their information but a lot of students also don't know why they should disclose it. If you are from a non-English speaking background but are speaking as well, why does it matter?

This is all part of ambiguity in the disclosure process. So we are asking questions of students and they don't know why we need to know.

We found some other interesting things as well in the study. Fear of labelling was equally shared by the three focus groups. Indigenous students have the least idea of prejudice while NES students didn't know why we needed to ask the question. Disabled and (inaudible) students place equally high importance on the benefits of disclosure.

So, in summary, students fear stigma. They are concerned about privacy, they are often not aware of the rights they have and the services they are entitled to, and they often choose to disclose not knowing what the benefits are. It's very ambiguous. Lots of students wait until a crisis point, which is what we really want to avoid. We want students to feel comfortable disclosing at any point.

When we surveyed staff, we found some reasons for this ambiguity and for these problems.

First, between universities, there are lots of different pathways for disclosure. If you go to one university, the means to put your hand up might be worlds apart from another university, whether it is down the road or in another state or on the other side of the country.

Universities also differ in the way that they actively reach out to students. Some universities are very active in reaching students and asking if they would like to disclose. Others are very hands-off. It depends on the student, they prefer.

We came up with ways to do disclosure better. The process and likely outcome should be clearer. Some adjustments should be available to all, which reduces the need to disclose. Access to hearing loops, access to ramps, those sorts of things a student should not have to come to us to ask for. Students want to decide the amount of relative information they disclose. So it should be student-centric, they should be in charge.

And finally, it should be confidential and students should know what information we have, how long we can have it for and what we can do with it. And importantly, why we need it.

Based on this we have six recommendations.

One, inclusive practices. Practices that reduce the need for students to disclose in the first place. In a perfect world, you don't need to come to us to ask for help, it is provided.

Second, options for disclosing. Can you disclose for one course where you might have particular needs, but another course where those needs are already being met, you don't need to disclose? Essentially, strengthen the room so that students disclose to the people that they want to disclose to and keep those people they don't feel comfortable disclosing to out.

Third, explain our equity programs and syllabuses. Students often disclose not knowing what will happen next. They need to be made clear - this is what happens when you disclose, this is a likely outcome, these are the services you can get access to.

Recommendation four, adopt clear and consistent definitions. Lots of the definitions at universities were based on medical criteria, they were deficits-based. "I have this disability", "I am from this disadvantaged background". What if it was socially and disadvantaged based? "I need access to this for so long." Then we are no longer looking at deficits but what a student needs at that time.

Recommendation five, encourage a wider understanding of diversity. Lots of students in interviews mentioned that staff members, teaching staff in particular, were very unsure when it came to hidden disabilities, particularly cognitive and sensory. So staff need to be trained to understand that disabilities are more than what is visible, you can't see them often.

Finally, allow non-responses. A lot of university admissions you can either say yes or no. And lots of them don't give an option to say, "Come back to me later.” “Can I give you this answer in another way?” “I don't feel comfortable answering this question in this part, but I will answer it in another part." This hands lots of control to students in how much they want to disclose. It is not just a yes or no, it becomes a continuum.

There were problematic aspects to this study as well. First of all, the three groups we focus on were given to us beforehand. That is Indigenous students, students living with a disability and students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

I am just beginning a new research project that is inspired by this one called 'Equity for What?' We're trying to pick apart these criteria. This actually emerges from a comment at another conference I was at where somebody put their hand up and said, "I am proud to be Indigenous but that is not an equity group for me. That is just my identity. I don't need any help." There is a difference between identifying as an equity group and asking for equity assistance.

And so emerging from this research, I want to know why these groups are seen as equity groups and not just seen as aspects of one's identity. There is a big difference between living with a disability and needing support for that disability. So, that is coming from this research.

How are we doing for time? Record time! Maybe we will get an early lunch. I will open of the floor to questions right now.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, Sean from UTS Library. Just wondering how, in particular, with the matters of terminology and vocabulary, how you would see pathways towards making that more consistent? Particularly when at universities these matters of equity and handling it, of course, tend to be spread across many different groups who may not be in constant communication, even with each other, such as academics, equity and accessibility services, and library.

MATTHEW WILKINSON:

OK... That is a really big question, and it is actually why I started looking at other research into this as well. There is a lot of silo thinking, in particular in large institutions like universities. I know the University of NSW, we have 17,000 members of staff. And at each of those connections between those members of staff, whether it is equity staff, practitioners, librarians, teaching staff, course conveners, they are going to have a different idea of what is an equity cohort, and what are the accommodations?

The solution is starting at the beginning, looking at what particular student needs are and how universities can best meet them. That is a big task to take on. But from my own research right now, these categories are really problematic.

We have been using them since 1988, the ‘White Paper’, and they were formally adopted in the 1991 ‘A Fair Chance for All’ paper, and have not changed much since then. There is a lot of miscommunication. I hope that answers your question.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, I am Julie from La Trobe in Victoria. I think everyone here would understand about the problems for our needing to use a medical model in order to register students, but that is a funding issue, and I am wondering – more of a comment – what we as a body can do to address that because I think that is a big problem, and it does lead to the increased rate of nondisclosure.

MATTHEW WILKINSON:

That is a really, really important question to ask because, while on the ground these categories might be problematic, in terms of funding that is where the money goes. And if you want to service these people, you need to get on with that funding, and you need to speak that language – you need to get on the level of the funders.

As practitioners, I think the best thing we can all do is continue to question those categories, be flexible and show discretion, and show a lot of common sense as well.

There have been scenarios where students haven't been able to select in a criteria more than one disability – they either had a disability or not. As practitioners, we can highlight that to IT services, we can bring that up with our vice chancellors, chancellors, department heads, and we can stay informed and seek reviews consistently.

I think an informed pool of practitioners is at least a start towards digging apart these categories, and reconsidering them. I hope that answered it. I'm still working on that problem myself.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I also have a question as well. So you talked about the rates of disclosure and people choosing to not disclose over the three marginalised communities that you were talking about 11% on average choosing not to disclose to the university. I'm wondering if there were any conversations in the interviews you did, any mention of making disclosure sexy or making disclosure appealing?

I mean, as a person who may not necessarily have to disclose many things apart from my fabulousness as a gay male, I can't necessarily empathise with the fact about how difficult it may be. But I wonder if there is a way to make it appealing? Obviously, as disability practitioners, when we register students who have chosen not to disclose in the initial circumstances, usually when they come to us at a later stage, it becomes more complex, the difficulties have compounded throughout the term of their degree. Yet, if they chose to disclose early on, and if it was a sexy into do, maybe they would. I'm just wondering if there were any conversations around that – how to make it more appealing or more of an easy process?

MATTHEW WILKINSON:

There were a lot of interviews about that, particularly about people's actual lived disclosure periods. And that was a model tried a little bit, in particular with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, where, in particular, 10-15 years ago at the start of the 21st century, Indigenous students were celebrated when they came to university and there was a lot of funding for that. Our interviews showed a lot of alumnae felt really uncomfortable being put on a spot like that.

What students actually wanted was very small but very straightforward disclosure practices. So rather than it being a celebration, which you would imagine would make sense, it should be completely normal. Right now the model is black and white. Students didn't want it to be colourful, but they want to recognise that there are shades of grey between.

So, I'm sorry, the answer was no.

(Laughter)

JACK CRANE:

I thought it might be! More questions? We have a few more minutes for questions if anyone has one they would like to ask. Debbie?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Debbie from UTS. I'm curious about the website you have given us the link to – it looks like a student resource. Can you explain it a bit? What is on it?

MATTHEW WILKINSON:

It is the same website we saw at the start. Students could advise on the research, give feedback, and now that it is published you can now find us on the website as a published report. I need to update this slide. We have been updating figures in the last minute, but we did not have a chance to update that website. I'm sure if I speak to the organisers they can update that on their website as well. Any last questions?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Lucky last, thank you. Hi, I am NDCO for Illawarra and south-east NSW. Thank you for your presentation. I also heard Colin Clarke present at a professional development day, so hearing your presentation is bringing the research to life.

You talked about the problem with the medical model, and the need for a social-relational model. I could not agree more. I see that as something that will potentially happen in the longer term. What recommendations do you have to improve practice around disclosure, and student feelings of safety in disclosing in the meantime?

MATTHEW WILKINSON:

The best recommendation I have is that we need more research. The categories that we use right now which were formed in the 1980s, as I am studying them right now with a few wonderful research assistants I am finding that a lot of these are ad hoc, that they have been put together throughout the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, and what we actually need to do is to actually go to the student body and asked them, "What do you need? What do you want?"

In terms of changing the model, students need to have a bigger role and a bigger voice. In particular in the six categories, three of which I discussed, the other three being women in non-traditional areas, students from remote and regional areas, and students from low socio economic backgrounds – low SES students. These six categories weren't informed by students at all, they were put together by policymakers, and inspired by a few reports in the 1970s and 1980s.

So the answer to your question is that we need more research, and we need to ask students what they want because it hasn't actually been done before. OK, I think that is it.

JACK CRANE:

Yes, that is all the questions. Please join me in thanking Matthew Wilkinson.

(Applause)

Thanks, everyone. I guess I should welcome back up Anthony to the stage. I think. Or should I just talk about the break? I will talk about the break.

We will have a slightly extended break. It will go from now until 10:50. So if you can be back at the concurrent sessions. I will tell you a bit about those sessions in case you were wondering.

In Ballroom A and Ballroom B, this one is split between two – in Ballroom A we have Hamish Fibbins talking about ‘‘Working Out’ mental health treatment’ with an exercise physiologist. We also have Berinda Karp – ‘What happens when attachment issues creates an unhealthy dependence between a client or student and the professional support staff?’ That will be in Ballroom B.

In the meeting room behind you will be Julie Rogan presenting ‘Collaboration for improved career development decisions for students with mental health conditions.’

If you can meet back in those areas at 10:50 sharp. Thanks.

(Break)

SPEAKER:

Ladies and gentlemen it gives me great pleasure to introduce the Lobbe brothers. We have Matt on the left and Tom in the middle and Caleb on the right.

Tom was a student at Swinburne University in our TAFE program. You are still there, doing horticulture. And probably about 12 months ago I received a phone call from Sophie, one of our accessibility advisors and she said to me, "I have this student, Tom, do you think it's OK if I nominate him for Young Victorian of the Year?" And I said, "I think that's OK. Give him a go. Absolutely."

And not to our surprise but to our delight, somebody has awarded Tom Young Victorian Inspirational TAFE Student of the Year.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

And we are lucky to have all of the Lobbe brothers here and also Mr and Mrs Lobbe. So thank you to the whole family for coming to talk to us today. And I will hand over immediately because there are lots of things they have to say and we need to hear.

MATT LOBBE:

Caleb and I are here to help Tom tell his story. He got diagnosed with schizophrenia at 19, and with lots of family and community support he is living a great life. His is a great story of someone managing his symptoms and sharing his story with everyone to help other people. We will get into that.

I will get Caleb to introduce itself quickly.

CALEB LOBBE:

I am the youngest and best looking of the three brothers. Works every time. I am a qualified teacher, integration aid qualification as well, and are currently working as youth pastor, I love working alongside young people of all backgrounds and abilities. And I'm here to support Matt and Tom in sharing Tom's story. Looking forward to hearing about all of you today.

MATT LOBBE:

I have played AFL for 11 years, going on 12 years. I played at Port Adelaide for 10 years. So I was away from Tom and the family for a big stint and the hard stuff. I recently came back last year to play for Carlton. So I am now back in Melbourne. Enjoying that.

We will get stuck into it. We will start with a story about Tom. Tom, can you give us a background growing up with a learning disability and what that was like?

TOM LOBBE:

Before I answer that. I want to say hello to everyone, and thank you to all of you for being here. It is a great privilege to be up here to be able to tell my story up here with my two best mates and my brothers.

Back to the question, Matty, I have grown up with a learning disability. It was quite difficult back in the day at school, I spent up to grade 2 before I learned how to read and write correctly. I am now a pretty good writer, but it's tough.

You always felt like you were behind the other students and felt a bit judged by everyone. Because you are always catching up. That was tough. For those first few years. And then going forth into the later years of primary school, it was still quite difficult because more is expected of you. The older you got with the tasks and things you’re learning.

Going into high school was probably the most difficult change because in primary school I had an integration aide right throughout and that was amazing. But high school life, I felt like I was probably not quite as well looked after, unfortunately. I still had some care but not quite the same, it was a big transition. Hopefully that explains it.

MATT LOBBE:

What about your last few years of high school and going into your apprenticeship.

TOM LOBBE:

The last few years of high school were very difficult. I managed to finish you 11 but not here 12. About halfway through year 10 and 11 I developed some hard-hitting anxiety and some OCD, and I did not know what was going on, I thought it was to do with my age and that it was natural – that I had a lot to learn, new concepts. It was hard and I thought that was what was making me anxious.

But going on from there, about two or three years later I got diagnosed with schizophrenia and that was a bit of a relief because I knew something had been going on and all that anxiety and OCD and stuff had a bit of a reason behind it. So that was cool, scary, but cool to know what I was up against because I've been up against it for so many years, and so to change perspective, I suppose, because I knew what troubles I was up against. And I knew I could join the fight and take it on rather than let the fight to beat me.

MATT LOBBE:

After Tom finished school and started his apprenticeship, it is when Tom was 19 and I was 21, Caleb I can't remember how old you were. (Laughs) But we were in Adelaide and it was the weekend of my debut for Port Adelaide and it was a big weekend for the family, and it was actually the weekend of Tom's onset of his psychosis. So it was pretty crazy for the family because we didn't know what was going on. I had been sheltered a fair bit by mum and dad from it.

But Tom, do you want to talk a bit about your memories of that weekend and what you can remember?

TOM LOBBE:

Yes, it's a bit blurred. It was so full on. I was pretty much in another world. It is fair to say I had no idea what was going on. I had some significant highs and lows. To be honest, it was as if I was on drugs or had had too much alcohol.

But the fact is, my illness is in fact stress-induced and not drug or alcohol induced. There is a common misconception that that is what schizophrenia entails. But obviously, that was not the case, it was stress induced. I had less stress going into my apprenticeship and studying at school, but that had turned into something that was too much, too difficult. And it boiled over in the time I was over in Adelaide, as Matt said.

I went from being a pretty standard guy to being somebody who was quite challenged and quite scared. I remember feeling more judged than I had ever felt in my life before. I mentioned before that I felt judged by learning needs and playing catch up, but this was three or four times the amount of catch up because I was so significantly lost in my world that I was coming into. It wasn't where I was for five years before that.

Does that make sense, Matt?

MATT LOBBE:

Yes it does. Caleb, do you want to talk a bit about that time?

CALEB LOBBE:

Sure. I remember the weekend. I remember the diagnosis, and for me as a brother, being told that your brother is diagnosed with schizophrenia is quite a big thing. And Mum and Dad did quite a good job of protecting me from it at the time. But looking back, it was a great move.

It didn't take me very long at all to just keep treating Tom how I had always treated him, as his younger brother, a bit of banter, having fun, enjoying day-to-day tasks together. That's to what Tom and I are like today in a relationship. The best thing I can do for him is be a brother and support him as I normally would as a brother.

MATT LOBBE:

What will I do now is talk about how you manage that initial period that was really tough for the whole family and we will get on to talking about the community and the big things that help for you. So, maybe if you can talk about the family and friends and that, how much that helped and first of all, was the most important thing that family and friends could be few in that initial period?

TOM LOBBE:

Family and friends is an interesting one. I think the best thing a friend or family member can do is what Caleb touched on and just be the same around that particular individual. For me, I just needed to be treated like everyone else despite the fact that I was going through these challenges. It's about being present. If someone is going through that stress and someone is not wanting to talk much not having much engagement, just be around and knowing that they are there is a huge one.

I knew that my brothers were there for me as much as they always have been in the past. I know that they are still there as much as they can be for me now and I am a lot more healthy than when I was in darker times. That's the best thing. Just being present and being around that individual while they are going through that stress are not asking too many questions or being in your face, challenging them from a too many questions perspective. I suppose.

MATT LOBBE:

What were your friends like at the start?

TOM LOBBE:

I must admit with the friends at the start, I was a little bit scared of what they would think. Having schizophrenia is a bit full on when it's dark. I was scared that they would look at me darkly as well. I found three or four months in, I got a little bit more used to the fact that I had an illness and had to be on medication. I think one or two of my friends who are really close to me now and I always was happy just having them around.

I must admit that it's hard in the first few months because I didn't feel like (inaudible). That's a difficult one. As I mentioned before, presence is the greatest thing. They were around me and looking out for me in any way they could. I just went to in my face.

MATT LOBBE:

Caleb, do you want to talk a bit about how Mum and Dad were able to talk to people in the community and managing symptoms, maybe with church and sporting clubs?

CALEB LOBBE:

I have a clear memory of the year that Tom was diagnosed. We were a part of the church youth group at the time and we all mingle with the same sort of people. Mum got on the front foot one afternoon and we got the youth together who were part of our inner circle and Mum sat down in a room and educated them about what was going on for Tom.

I think they had figured out that something was happening with Tom but they were not sure what was happening. That was a key moment because Mum educated them about Tom's experience and what might be happening for him and what it might look like in his hearing voices or seeing signs, but also assuring them that he is OK and he had support around and they should just be there to hang out with them and be there as they normally would.

I remember that community is a key part of Tom and his recovery. People around him being educated, particularly in that point of time it was the group of friends who were hanging out with and it was a relief to you knowing that they knew what was going on.

TOM LOBBE:

I will just elaborate on that. It was a relief to me. I was too scared at the time to actually tell them the specifics of the illness. I did not want to be too black-and-white about it. Having them been told it was a weight off my shoulders because they had an understanding of what the illness was about and that was really cool.

I did not want to know the specifics initially, but, something I've learned over time is that knowledge is a powerful thing and it's better to share than to hold up and keep it in yourself. If that makes sense?

MATT LOBBE:

It does. Do you want to share a little bit about what the symptoms are like for you and how you manage it? Just give everyone a bit of an idea.

TOM LOBBE:

The fact is, I hear voices every day. I heard a lot coming here, not today so much, today has been quite relaxed. But on my way up here, flying up, it was pretty difficult. Being among the crowd of the plane and in the airport and the hotel being around lots of people, I must admit it is difficult. I hear voices from anyone and everyone at any point in time. I don't know when it's going to come or go or what level they will be out.

I can't tell if they will be intense or mild. I don't know what they will be saying, it's just a random thing. I can't turn them off either. It's very hard. Don't get me wrong, but what I will say is that I've learnt a lot of great strategies to deal with the voices.

Touching on some of the things I do here. On the way up here, I was hearing things like, "Oh, you're not good, you shouldn't be on the plane, you don't need to come here". Just really derogatory sort of stuff that is absolute rubbish, but at the time it feels so real. It is a clear voice. The fact is that they are not true and I can rationalise very well.

I don't know how many of you are familiar with cognitive behaviour strategies but I have practised that and to my own credit, been able to use that to get through. It is difficult coming up here, but it's great to be here today.

MATT LOBBE:

What other strategies do you use, for example like yesterday when you're feeling stressed, give us an idea of strategies that you used?

TOM LOBBE:

Because I'm quite articulate, I like to talk. You probably picked up on that pretty fast. I had to change space yesterday. I was sitting in one spot in the hotel for a while and I thought that I need to get out and change the environment. That is the best strategy behind the one that I just mentioned, rationalisation. When you change space, you change the intensity of the voices by moving away from them into a different environment.

What I did yesterday, as I said to Matt, let's let Caleb watch the cricket because he is a cricket tragic, and that I was happy because I was outside in the fresh air and went for a walk along the beach by myself, had a chat to Mum on the phone and just got reassured by the different environment that that was where I was meant to be and I went back into that happy place even though I was in a down place from the voices that were hitting me really hard while I stayed in that space in the hotel.

MATT LOBBE:

Thanks, mate. We'll get back into talking about the community and the impact that has had on your recovery. Tom's first work after the illness was actually at my old school as a gardener, landscaper. They were really a supportive environment. You want to talk about that team of people and how that helped you?

TOM LOBBE:

I have to be honest, it took time to develop that supportive environment. It did not happen so fast. I had to break down some barriers. When I was first day, my boss was pretty supportive. But the stuff they did not know - how to handle me - I had to teach them and train them and so did my mum as well. She had lengthy chats with the principal and the college and my boss, the manager.

Having left that job approximately six weeks ago now, I was there for six full years, which is one of the longer or longest held jobs for someone with schizophrenia because, obviously, it's quite hard to hold a job. The reason why I did hold the job was because I created that supportive environment with people like my mum who had chats with my boss at regular intervals and the agencies that provided funding for the schools. When I was slow to learn how to work again.

Because I was literally learning how to work again because I couldn't handle things day to day and being on medication, now looking to today where I'm great at work and I run my own business, it took three or four months for the guys to get the hang of me and understand my needs a bit. I think we broke down some huge barriers and I think that's really important.

Because they know all about that, breaking down barriers is a huge thing that needs to be done with mental health and with intellectual disability such as my learning needs.

MATT LOBBE:

A couple of the key things like flexible working hours, I just wanted to talk about that.

TOM LOBBE:

Short and sharp. With my medication, I get quite tired in the morning. I'm quite groggy from it. We decided in order to get the best out of me, starting at 9:30 would be better than starting at 8:00 so that my levels would be well monitored. That was great.

I think that needs to happen in that sort of environment more because it got the best out of me and they make changes like that to enhance my ability to work.

MATT LOBBE:

I'll give you a break from talking. We'll go to Caleb. We'll talk about what Tom is doing now with this small business and what he is like every day.

CALEB LOBBE:

Yes, absolutely. At this you know, he loves to talk. That's one thing. It's been great to see Tom over the years grow and his confidence and his ability to move forward in the workplace go back to study as well. I have been pretty much around Tom since the onset of the illness. I have lived with him for a lot of that.

The big thing of note is his growth in confidence, particularly people around him have been able to get an understanding of what he goes through and supported through that. And as he will tell you now, he has many clients he works with in is gardening business. He has many social networks that he worked through and he has a particular positive impact on the community around him.

I think that a credit to the support that he's had around him but also to himself in the way his been resilient and being able to proactively try to move forward whilst managing an illness.

MATT LOBBE:

We might get into talking about the tape stuff now which is the most applicable to everyone here. If we can put the video up, we have a little short video about Tom's story at TAFE over the last few years.

(Video plays)

TOM LOBBE:

I hear voices. I have schizophrenia and that is challenging at times, but I feel like I'm at a point now where I'm allowed to share my story. The kids, they basically had all left school. I went to talk to them and told them how I left school early and (inaudible) I tend to do a lot more of that.

SOPHIE:

We created an access plan which I forwarded to his teachers. The ongoing support, coming in one day a week and he comes in to see me to touch base and let me know if he is having a good or bad day if there's any issues it's quite good that we keep in contact.

TOM LOBBE:

The teachers have been wonderful. Even the cafeteria staff have been fantastic.

(Video ends)

MATT LOBBE:

You want to talk about coming back to TAFE after a few years?

TOM LOBBE:

Yes. I actually enjoyed TAFE after coming back. It's actually a great place to go. I came back after eight years after being away from illness. I always held onto my dream of coming back, I knew that I wasn't doing well but I held onto my dream and decided to go back eight years later.

When I did, I had the new approach and a new approach was that I would actually lean on support. When I was first-year, I was a bit too scared of my peers and the teachers and similar to what I went through in high school where I was worried about what people thought of me and they were judging me for how different I was with my needs.

Later on, as I said, with this new approach, I said to myself, "I am going to ask for all the help I can get and I am going to lean on the teachers and lean on people such as Sophie," as we saw in the video who has been absolutely amazing and who I credit to keeping me at TAFE and allowing me to do well at it and really enjoy it.

I'll be able to recover and knock on the door and Sophie will be like, "I will be with you in just a minute". She looks up to me and listens to all the challenges that I'm going through that point in time. There are challenges. TAFE's great, I enjoy what I'm learning, but there are still rough patches and people like Sophie get me through those rough moments and transformed the way I feel.

MATT LOBBE:

Did you find it scary going back?

TOM LOBBE:

I did find it scary. It was scary from the point of view that I was starting again and going back to where I left off from when I was quite ill. That was going to stay in the back of my mind and I thought that I might still be ill and still find it hard that there were people like Sophie there make it a really amazing experience.

I went from the last few weeks of when I left as an apprentice to doing it really tough and almost hating the place because of the voices that I had, to coming back in a new light, actually looking at TAFE as something that I can do, and learning it is possible for a guy with schizophrenia. And the fact is that it is possible because people like Sophie and the new approach that I had where I decided to actually use everything I could.

The teachers have been absolutely amazing as well.

MATT LOBBE:

So, the key people you said were Sophie, the teachers and your counsellor as well. Is that right? Do you want to talk a bit about a care program, Caleb?

CALEB LOBBE:

I'm sure most people will know about the individual plans. I can see the impact this has had on Tom. There have been nights where he will be concerned about an assignment and I can reassure him that he has this individual plan and program and that there is flexibility, as he spoke about before, flexibility about when assignments are due, class times, things like that. And the fact that Sophie has communicated that with his teachers, I know that is having a positive impact.

MATT LOBBE:

What about other things that have happened at TAFE to help you? Your weekly debrief?

TOM LOBBE:

One thing about the weekly plan is that it doesn't stay the same. I have found that I can alter that plan a bit based on some insight I have developed over time in being in that journey at TAFE. Circumstances can change, you may have a different teacher or student in your class and then that changes your perspective as well.

So what I have noticed is I am able to say to Sophie, "Look, I have some insight now from this new teacher, I think it would be great if we could do something like have a debrief at the end of the class just to hear from them that affirmation that I am doing well and that I am having a good day even though the voices are telling me I am having a bad day."

So, to have a debrief at the end of the day was something I had come up with and so he put it straight into the plan. And it's helped a lot in the last six months of TAFE. It's very cool.

MATT LOBBE:

What about talking to your classmates about what you have been through? How was that?

TOM LOBBE:

I have actually spoken to my classmates twice. My very first class was a really cool class, a unique class, I must admit. The response from them was wonderful.

I built up the courage over time to chat to some of them individually and say, "I have learning challenges and a bit of this." And as I told one or two people I kind of thought, "We are all friends here, we are all here for one purpose, to learn and to enjoy one another's company." And I knew I had enough strength to know that these guys were all in it together and I thought, "I will ask my teacher if I can chat to them as a full group." And she said, "That would be awesome. Great." So she was supporting and amazing.

And I did it and just as much weight off my shoulders knowing that they knew some of the darker stuff that I went through. And they could recognise that what I was going through was the brutality of the illness and not just me being a bit brutal. It was the brutality of the illness and not of me, if that makes sense. So they developed a real understanding of what I had been going through where I might look blank faced or really fearful in the face, which is often a way that the voices are displayed to any individual that doesn't understand.

MATT LOBBE:

Thanks, mate. We might wrap things up there. All of my notes for conclusion you have already covered.

If anyone has any questions, Tom, Caleb and myself are more than happy to answer. Was there anything else you wanted to add, firstly, Tom? About TAFE or...?

TOM LOBBE:

I think I've covered it fairly well. But I do want to say that all of you guys here are here for one purpose and that is to learn more about your job and how best you can support people with differences such as myself. So well done on coming today and making an effort to be here this week. I wish you all well.

(Applause)

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, Tom. I work for TAFE and doing learning and mental health and support students on the Central Coast. Thank you so much for sharing your story. I hope this wouldn't be a rude question because I would really like to know about those voices. Just so it gives me an insight into other students. Is it your voice or is it other people's voices that you hear telling you these things?

TOM LOBBE:

That's an interesting question because what can happen is that the voices I get can create my own voice as well. So I can get loads of voices from other people in a certain environment, but then they can beat me up so much that I get my own internal voice going on on top of that. Telling them to go away or asking what they are saying – all that is going on up here as well as what they are saying.

That is when things are really intense, when things aren't that intense, I can employ that rationalisation. And then my own internal voice disappears. But it's just those voices on their own that are external from other people. Does that make enough sense?

COMMENT FROM FLOOR:

I think so, thank you.

MATT LOBBE:

Tom, what is the most common type of voice you get? Is it from someone in the room or outside the room?

TOM LOBBE:

I will give you an example. Yesterday, I had voices coming from outside the room, being inside the hotel room. I rationalised and said to Matt and Caleb, "Can you guys hear anything? Are there any voices going on? Is anyone actually talking?" And they told me they were not, so then I was reassured. But to be honest, it only dampened the voices, they were still going. Because I was just a bit stressed.

And what they were saying was things like, "This guy is a bit of a loser." "He's a bit of a loser." And, "He’s only young, he has a long life ahead of him."

MATT LOBBE:

Any positive voices?

TOM LOBBE:

I actually do. I have trained myself. When I'm going really well I will get one saying, "Gee, you are a great gardener!" Or, "Wow, look at that lawn over there." Or, "You are doing a great job with that rose. That is the best rose I've ever seen." I have incorporated voices like that.

MATT LOBBE:

Well done.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, Tom, I am Sally. Just hearing you say you were so relieved when you got a diagnosis, and you obviously have a very supportive community, have you had any role models or examples in your community that have helped you through your process of getting an education and some people where you can say, "OK, it is not just me."?

TOM LOBBE:

Absolutely. It is not just me. You have hit the nail on the head. I don't credit how well I am going to myself. But to those around me. I have had lots of different mentors and support along the way.

Being that I find it harder to learn, I had a guy who taught me how to drive which was really cool. I thought that being on medication and being in the thick of the illness, I would never drive again. But I could. And he has been great. He always checks in with me. That is one mentor.

Another guy is our local Reverend. It's no secret that I have a pretty strong faith and that has held strong. And the reason is because I have great examples like the local Reverend, Reverend Owen, who is Caleb's boss, because Caleb is a pastor.

He was instrumental right throughout the illness. My recollection of him staying overnight with us because things were really dark. And he has been with the right throughout that process. If I am having a rough week I can send a text and he will ring me up the next day and a talk at all through. There have been some cool things in that respect.

Furthering on into coming back to TAFE, there have been teachers. Guys called Mike and Frank. Amazing teachers. They are guys who started the debrief thing for me. Naturally they were giving me some debriefing without even thinking about it. And then it made me think that if I got that continually, if I got it each week, I would be a lot better person going home.

I remember going home and hearing voices about the day that I had had, and I couldn't focus much on the road. And I wondered what I could do to change that. And I asked Sophie and they talked to Mike and Frank, and they have been great this year. Getting through.

The other thing is that Sophie has been incredibly pivotal to continuing study at Swinburne. She is amazing, a beautiful person. I think quite a few of you know her quite well. She has made a studying possible.

I didn't mention to you guys earlier in the talk that I nearly quit TAFE the first day I went back. I had a bad teacher and I was scared of my class and I had voices and I was anxious and I wondered how I would continue. And I got in touch with Sophie and she talked me through it and the most amazing way.

And that change is what made perspective about how I would learn best and how I could go on to achieve some great things. And I thought I had already won just being nominated for that price.

CALEB LOBBE:

Can I just add something? There are about 200 people here who do similar things to what Sophie does, and I just wanted to provide an encouragement to you all as a fellow educator. I just wanted to say, and I think Mum will also talk on behalf of this, just the impact of support workers and integration aides and teachers have all had a huge impact on Tom's journey.

I wanted to encourage everyone here and just say that the role that you play in individuals' lives is phenomenal and vital. And Tom's journey is a great example of that. You should take great heart in what you are doing.

MATT LOBBE:

I think we also need to acknowledge how amazing Mum and Dad have been in the process. Without them nothing else would have been possible. Can we give them a clap? They have come all the way up here as well.

(Applause)

MATT LOBBE:

It might be harder dealing with someone going through a disability or challenge if they didn't have supportive parents as well. That makes it a lot easier.

TOM LOBBE:

You can see that it is pretty evident. They have been here today. They have been through a lot in the past eight or nine years. I don't think I would be here without them, to be honest. They're just amazing, our parents. So, thanks for coming and keep up the good work. (Laughs)

(Applause)

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Is this on? I can hear it now. I just have a question about, we get really warm and fuzzy about the role that we play but we don't get to hear about actual students. I just wanted to say that you're the one that does the work and you sit there and do the assessments and you're the one that manages and cops it. I think that needs to be said, and to say thank you.

You just need to be reminded that you are doing well and highlight things that you have achieved in that day and sometimes that's what we need to remember. Just little moments of encouragement that someone as good as Sophie, who is a role model to all of us, that you are doing well. Sometimes we get bogged down and those things can be difficult but I wanted to thank you very much and thank you for inviting a student to talk.

TOM LOBBE:

Thanks, Claire, that's awesome.

MATT LOBBE:

I think we have time for one final question. Anyone?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thank you so much for coming here and sharing your story with us. Thank you to all. Just a question, in terms of you acknowledging your wins each day, do you prefer that someone tells you or do you prefer that someone will help you recollect how well you did? Do you call that a debriefing, a process of helping you, or do you prefer someone really tell you how you did?

TOM LOBBE:

It's a bit of a tough one. I sort of like a bit of both, to be honest. If I will be truthful, a bit from me, bit from Sophie, a bit from my brothers. I might come home from a day at TAFE and so wasn't that great and they will talk about what I did. They'll say that it sounds pretty good and I'll be like, "Oh, OK". Just reassurance is a lot.

I can get that in any way imaginable really. I can't really answer the question, to be honest. I think it's also due to the fact that I do hear voices.

COMMENT FROM FLOOR:

Thank you so much.

SPEAKER:

Ladies and gentlemen, I think I would like you to put your hands together to thank Tom, Caleb, and Matt.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

What an absolute privilege it is to hear from the voice of sufferers, which we often don't get to do. My lovely team members will present you with a small gift as a token before you run off. Once again, thank you very, very much for your time and for being here ensuring that journey with us, Tom, it's really fantastic.

That actually draws to an end of this session. Then we come to the end of the conference now. We have a few things to do, in fact. The first one I wanted to do is to invite Rick up onto the stage. Speedy...?

Tom, when you talk about the relief you experience when you found out and got that diagnosis, I can so relate to that. I spent a week in hospital once thinking I had a brain tumour and at the end of the week, they said to me, "You've got MS". And I thought, "Is that all?". That's a lot easier to deal with.

RICK:

I've got the great pleasure of being able to talk to you right now about a little more than just where the bathrooms are. I'm really going to enjoy this.

(Laughter)

RICK:

I had some involvement in organising the Pathways9 back in Melbourne in 2008. I have a real insight into the complexities of putting together such a major conference that we've just been at for the last few days. Each one of us has made it into a success.

Thank you to everyone for being here and being part of building the body of knowledge that we take with us and improving our services and coming back for another go in 2020.

I'd first like to thank our amazing sponsors, and I will start with the wise guys from WISE Employment. Thank you to the WISE guys.

(Applause)

RICK:

Next, our interpreters have been absolutely fantastic, so I'd like to say a big thank you to them, Macquarie University.

(Applause)

RICK:

Our bronze partner, the Northern Beaches Council. A big thank you to them.

(Applause)

RICK:

Our name badge and lanyard partner, Texthelp. Thank you to them.

(Applause)

RICK:

Our satchels have been brought to you by Databee student assist.

(Applause)

RICK:

Our session partners UTS, University of Sydney, and University of New South Wales.

(Applause)

RICK:

Our captioning which has been tremendous over the last few days has been brought to you by Ai-Media.

(Applause)

RICK:

And our video partner, thank you very much to you. (Inaudible)

(Applause)

RICK:

Our support grant providers, the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

(Applause)

RICK:

Fantastic, and now I would like to say very special thank you to Commsec for their assistance. And the Novotel for putting us up.

(Applause)

RICK:

It wouldn't be the day is today without those donations, so thank you to all of those who have provided funds for us.

(Applause)

RICK:

And the wonderful ATEND, a big body who has provided assistance, without you this will not happen. Thank you, ATEND.

(Applause)

RICK:

Back to the Pathways committee. As I said, I have a little bit of (inaudible). What that has involved. Thank you to everyone for bringing this thing to us.

(Applause)

RICK:

And, as I said before, each and every one of you our delegates who create the  big thoughts and conferences when we get together and share our information, a very special thank you to each of you. Thank you for coming.

(Applause)

RICK:

Over to you.

SPEAKER:

I realise that we forgot to tell you about the AGM that was on Wednesday, Wednesday evening. The election of the new committee, the executive committee for the ATEND group. I would just to thank Dallas... Dallas has left the building. We will find her next time.

But what about Cathy who is our new Vice President?

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

And Cynthia, our bean-counter.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

And I'm very honoured to have been re-elected as the president of ATEND for the next two years. And it was last night as I watch the presentation of the life memberships that actually dawned on me what a task this is and what an incredible organisation ATEND is. My pledge is to do whatever I can as president of ATEND to further our cause, to extend our reach. We have an incredible skill and knowledge base here but we have limited it just to education, industry needs to know what we already know. They are crying out to know the stuff.

I think we have enormous potential to share our knowledge and wisdom and our experience into secondary education. Wouldn't it be wonderful if students could transition from secondary education into territory education with some kind of handover? A simple thing like that would be incredible.

I think we have a lot of work to do over the next couple of years and I'm looking forward to doing it with you all and with my executive committee and most particularly, with the broader national committee which is made up of representatives from TAFE and higher education in every state and territory in Australia. Together, we can make a real difference, as we have done.

I would like at this point now to bring up the organising committee for Pathways14 to acknowledge the incredible work. Just attending the conference gives you no conception of what has gone into it over the last couple of years. I have only been involved in the past couple of years and it's been an extraordinary experience.

I would like to invite all those who are still here to come forward. (Laughs) And folks, if we could acknowledge the incredible, fine work that this committee has done in bringing us together.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

And somebody…

SPEAKER:

Strange as it might seem, I do like microphones. First of all, the fundraising last night, we have raised over $1,500 which will go to ATEND, so thank you. And it will also go to colleagues who helped get that one setup as well.

When I going to go through the whole range of thank yous again, but I think on behalf of Dagmar and myself I would like to thank the committee the work they have done over the last two years and intensely over the last six months or something.

Everyone has made marvellous contributions. They are a very professional group of people who brought different expertise to the committee and that was a value as well. We all had different strengths and contributions to make.

Perhaps it may be prudent, I know from my personal viewpoint, to thank my work colleagues, but also to thank my husband, mostly, because I know he is on the receiving end of various stresses that may have been occurring from running a conference.

I assume that all of us probably have a family member who we have pushed and acknowledge that they have contributed to this colleagues as well. Thank you to family members.

We did also want to make reference to the support of ATEND in running this conference, and particularly acknowledging, in more recent times, Anthony, who has provided some pretty significant guidance around the conference and how we were going to run things.

As is, thank you to the whole of ATEND, and that's a cross national and state because they are all there in different ways helping out. Thank you to Anthony and his patience and guidance.

Perhaps it's important we acknowledge all of the speakers we have had over the past three days. I think they have all been incredibly inspirational and thought-provoking in their own way. I am not sure if many of the speakers are here but I think we can certainly recognise we have gained lots of value from those speakers and we do acknowledge their contribution and support to us.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

The exhibitors are out there or are probably packing up but I wish to acknowledge the exhibitors who came along as well and provided us as they always do with lots of new ideas, technology, and the ways we can do our job better.

We would like to also acknowledge our photographer that we have had here for the last three days. Sue is from Accessible Arts, and we've a much appreciate her work over these three days. Please can you give her a round of applause.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

I know you have all been mentioned as the delegates. But we thank you again for all the contributions you have made here. This is your opportunity to network, build, learn, get guidance, but also we had an emphasis on this conference to talk about and acknowledge well-being. Hopefully in various ways we have supported each other with our own well-being, about a bit of an 'aha' moment. 'Perhaps I need to revisit where my well-being is, particularly with the nature of things we do.'

Just checking the list. The last of the list was also to remind everyone that we really, really value the feedback that comes from Pathway conferences. And so you have all received, via email, the evaluation. Can you please spend the time to give that feedback. Good, bad and indifferent, this is what we need because this is around making sure we can continue to provide a professional and valuable conference to our members. So, please, fill out the evaluations. Thank you.

SPEAKER:

Ok that is it, guys. Except, there is one last thing that as a committee we need to do.

SPEAKER:

The thing that we need to do is hand over the banner, the ceremonial banner, to our lovely colleagues from the Northern Territory.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

Anna and Chris and Candace, please step forward. We have had a long consultation with our colleagues from the Northern Territory yesterday, and what we will do is conduct a feasibility study to make sure we can run the conference in the Northern Territory and turn a profit.

There is lots of work that has to go in over the next couple of months which our colleagues will undertake to make sure we can actually create a conference that we can all afford to come to, and that we can have a wonderful time.

So they will check that out over the next couple of months and see where we go. My hope is that everything checks and we can be in Darwin in two weeks' time.

So, I would invite you to hand over the ceremonial banner, and applause to our new team.

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

And there is a video to entice us all to Darwin.

(Video plays)

(Dramatic music)

(Applause)

SPEAKER:

Wow, I'm a bit worried about the thought of crocodiles chasing me down the street. But apart from that looks pretty amazing, doesn't it? That is just day one, OK. There are not a lot of us in the Northern Territory so they made need some support and assistance from the rest of us. So I am just wondering, will people be willing to provide that support when the time comes?

Fantastic. So you won't be on your own.

Ladies and gentlemen, what I would like to say is – thank you for being here, this has been an extraordinary conference, and thank you to the organising committee who have made it happen.

I have had an incredible time. And I think that from the faces, everybody else has. Is it a thumbs up? Brilliant. Have a safe trip home, wherever that may be. And I look forward to seeing everyone into years. And to our ongoing wonderful conversations on the email list server. And what a valuable resource that is.

So, thank you everyone for being here, for the wonderful work that you do. And we look forward to seeing you in two years.

(Applause)

(Captions off)

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