**Melbourne Fringe Radical Access Provocations for Change – 11 October 2022**

**Transcript – part one**

This is the transcript for part one of the Radical Access Provocations for Change event at the 2022 Melbourne Fringe Festival – held on 11 October 2022.

**Caroline Bowditch** 00:00

To make a start, good afternoon, everybody and welcome to this afternoon's radical access event here at the Trades Hall as part of Melbourne Fringe Festival. We've been working on this Radical Access program together for about the last 12 months, I want to say, but it's been a lot longer in the making. I should say that my name is Caroline Bowditch and I have the privilege and pleasure of being the CEO at Arts Access Victoria. And we are one of the partners involved in the Radical Access program here with Melbourne Fringe. I want to begin by acknowledging that we are on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. It is always a privilege to create art on these lands that have been where art has been made and culture has been occurring for 65,000 years. So I want to just acknowledge any First Nations people who might be in the space with us today. And I want to thank you all for coming for this conversation. So you all have read the blurb, but just in case, people haven't read the blurb, and you're wondering why you're here, or what this is, just bear with me one second. The joys of aging. So throughout 2022, Deaf and Disabled artists, some of which are on this panel today, have come together in a closed space to discuss barriers and successes about making art making processes accessible. There have been moments for reflection and connection, a space for disability communities to discuss big issues in a private space. These have been the Radical Access inner circles. And primarily they've been facilitated by Carly Findlay, who is my co facilitator today. Coming out of these conversations have been provocations, not for other members of the circle, but for the art sector and society at large. That's what we're here to discuss today. Because the actions required to remove barriers for Deaf and Disabled communities sit with us all. So I suppose the question is, what can we individually and collectively commit to that will have a meaningful impact on the path to cultural equity, which is very clearly the vision for for art's access and for Melbourne Fringe. I am going to get my panelists to introduce themselves. And before I do that, I'm just going to start by doing a little audio description of myself. Today I am looking a little bit like a watermelon in that I'm wearing a green dress I have a pink scarf and pink shoes and watermelon earrings and a necklace, [that's] also a watermelon, a slice of watermelon. I have red rimmed glasses and I am sitting in my fairly dodgy motorized wheelchair that's called Tina Sparkles. [ Audience laughs] Because it has to have a name. I'm going to get everyone to introduce themselves. But first I just want to let you know that this is a disability lead and disability held space we will be employing today a thing that we like to call "crip time". So things will take the time that they take. We will be finished by four o'clock. But we will let this conversation flow as it needs to. We will build breaks in throughout the session. And I wanted to just also say that there may be moments that you or the panelist experience of discomfort. And what I just wanted to say about discomfort is that it's something that we need to sit in. And what I would say is that discomfort, and I'm learning this at the moment, discomfort is different to safety. And it's really natural that some of these conversations may provoke feelings of discomfort. But without discomfort there is no change. We don't get pills without agitation. So we need to be able to sit in the discomfort that we might feel collectively. So I'm just going to encourage people, if those feelings of discomfort rise, to sit with them, to breathe through them, and to know that it's a process of learning, but also know that there may be things that are triggering for you. And what I would say is, if that happens, then look after yourselves, do what you need to, in order for you to feel safe, but know that you can hang in with us. It's going to be an afternoon of truth telling. And I recently learned a fantastic quote from Bell Hooks, that says the heart of justice is truth telling, seeing ourselves and the world the way it is, rather than the way we want it to be. So this afternoon, we're going to talk about the way it is. And we're going to also start thinking about the way we want it to be. So that's enough about me. And I'm now going to pass down the line. And I'm going to get each of my panelists to introduce themselves. Tell us your name. What's brought you to the panel today? And then we'll pass on to the next person. And if you can audio describe yourself as well.

**Janice Florence** 06:32

Yes, I'm not sure how close I have to be to this microphone. I think this close. So my name is Janice Florence, and I'm the artistic director of Weave Movement Theatre, which has been going for about 25 years now. And in their early days, we had the pleasure of having Caroline as a performer in the group. And I'm also the Manager of Training and Consultation at Arts Access Victoria. So I'm a middle aged white woman wearing regulation Melbourne black, [Caroline laughs] mostly with a few touches of other calours, with orange and brown. And I use a wheelchair to get around.

**Carly Findlay** 07:24

Thanks, Janice. Do you want us to move your microphone?

07:26

Yeah that's sort of Yeah, that's an interesting position, movement wise. [Another panelist, Anniene, moves Janice's microphone]

**Anniene Stockton** 07:38

Is that better?

**Janice Florence** 07:39

Yeah. Thank you.

**Carly Findlay** 07:44

Hi, I'm Carly Findlay. I am access advisor here at Melbourne Fringe and I've been working with Caroline and other fringe staff on the radical access program this year and last year and prior to that I was access and inclusion coordinator here. Outside of fringe...

**Anniene Stockton** 07:59

Carly?

**Carly Findlay** 07:59

Oh, yes.

**Anniene Stockton** 08:00

Can you speak up for the captioner?

**Carly Findlay** 08:02

Yes. Okay. Outside of Fringe, I am a writer, a speaker, a trainer, I guess. And I do, mostly talking about how to make things more accessible and inclusive. My audio description - I'm a woman with a red face and short dark curly hair. It's tied back. I am rebelling against a Melbourne black, always. I have a bright pink jacket on and a pant suit. I guess that's bright blue, pink shoes. And a brooch that suit woman of colour blowing bubblegum. I'll pass on to Grace.

**Grace Jarvis** 08:42

Hello, My name is Grace Jarvis. I'm a Melbourne based stand up comedian. [Microphone feedback sounds] I should be better with mic technique. Given my job. Is that better? Now I'm broken. I'm a 24 year old white woman. I've got an orange t shirt on that says lovers and legs. [Caroline laughs] I just looked down at the rest of me. I was like black tights black shoes. I amautistic, and I've got a chronic pain condition. These are my credentials here. [Caroline laughs]

**Carly Findlay** 09:31

How are you involved in the arts?

**Grace Jarvis** 09:33

I am a stand up comedian and a writer and, I dunno, a tweet. [Caroline laughs]

**Carly Findlay** 09:41

Thanks, Grace. Penny.

**Penny Pollard** 09:46

Hi, my name is Penny. I'm always a little bit behind because I'm using the captioning. So I'm metalsmith and a contemporary jeweler. And I've been an arts worker in Canberra for for I've years but I've moved back to Melbourne on focusing full time on my arts practice. I'm a Caucasian woman with red henna-d hair, baby bangs, Melbourne black outfit. I have a nice necklace that talks to my hearing loss with a cochlear spiral. Thank you.

**Anniene Stockton** 10:27

Hello, my name is Anniene. That's a n n i e n e. Perfect. I am a producer, director, designer actor of 25 years I've worked independently in theatre companies, festivals, various art boards, and I am currently Program Coordinator - Artists and Venues at Melbourne Fringe.

**Caroline Bowditch** 11:05

Great. Thanks Anniene.

**Anniene Stockton** 11:10

Oh, I have pale skin, blonde hair, red rimmed glasses, black T shirt with Pikachu. Blue jeans, black sneakers with petroleum coloured caps, and a red walking cane.

**Liel Bridgford** 11:34

My name is Liel, that spelled L I E L. I'm a writer, poet, podcaster and disability justice advocate. I'm also a parent and just want to give a bit of a warning that I've got a kid with me here. So if I walk out it's because my kid needs me. So it's not because I don't find this very valuable. And yeah, thank you so much for having me. Oh, my a description of a white looking person with only skein of God brown hair, my hair is a beat up, go glasses, pretty denim, denim jacket, denim pants and a black end mustard top. And I've got my disability pride badge that I just made a few days ago. So I'm pretty happy about that.

**Carly Findlay** 12:22

Amazing. I also want to say we are recording this in the form of audio recording today. And we we have Ashley Ellis, who's positioned over near the wall. Ashley is a graphic artist and will be recording this graphic, you know, in picture form as well. We'll get this to you somehow when it goes up on our website.

**Caroline Bowditch** 12:50

Thanks, Carly. Thanks, everybody. So this afternoon is really a witnessed conversation for all of you that are in the audience that we might have behind closed doors. But we wanted to invite people to be part of it, because that's the only way change is going to come. So it's going to be raw, and it's going to be real. And we are going to respond to the questions. I've got a couple of questions or provocations that I'm going to throw to all of you for you to give you a genuine answers and responses to. And my first question is, and just reading it, I realized that it's a bit of a closed question. But, My first question is, do you think the art sector is doing a good job at creating accessible events? And anyone that wants to can start, but just if you can indicate and before you start speaking, just remind us of your name so that people can track where you are? So do you think the art sector is doing a good job at creating accessible events? Penny?

**Penny Pollard** 14:11

I'll respond first. In Melbourne. I've been back here for two years. And we've had a lot happen. The Fringe Festival I've been involved in twice, last year in this year for the first time ever, and Alter State at the Art Centre with Arts Access Victoria. I just had three days at Meeting Place, which is part of Arts Access Australia at the Wheeler Centre, which I wasn't aware of. So I think at the moment I'm feeling on a bit of a high that it's been quite positive and a lot been good. And even this event to have live captioning for me is so essential and always not present. Always always not present. And it's been ongoing trauma and worry and stopping me throughout my arts career and life to be able to be involved. So, at the moment, it's looking positive in Melbourne, particularly for me. That's all for me.

**Caroline Bowditch** 15:23

Thanks, Penny.

**Janice Florence** 15:24

So it's Janice Florence. I think things have gradually grown. I've been working in Texas now for nearly 11 years, I think. And over that time things have grown, you know,

**Anniene Stockton** 15:43

Sorry Janice.

**Janice Florence** 15:44

Yeah.

**Anniene Stockton** 15:44

Can you speak a little louder? Perhaps a little higher for the captioner?

**Janice Florence** 15:51

Higher, like that?

**Carly Findlay** 15:52

We'll get some helium. [Panel laughs]

**Janice Florence** 15:57

Yeah, I was saying that I think access has grown to the arts over the last 11 years that I've been in Arts Access. And I think there's a growing awareness in arts organisations. Some are very conscientious and insiduousand some are a bit lacksadaisycal or take on some things and not others. I think Arts Access has done a lot of work to make this happen, too. And in my physical theatre work, I think, yeah, there's more awareness. But I find I'm constantly having to educate somebody around, you know, who's involved in things. I think there's a much more desire to do you know, the right thing. Yeah, so I think things are developing, I think, where it falls down sometimes is that, you know, there's a history and there's a history of exclusion. And so for as far as audiences and artists who are Deaf or Disabled go, I think it's, it's a transitional period. And it will take a lot of goodwill and action for access, to persuade people to to be involved. Some people anyway, I mean, some people want to be involved very actively, but to persuade sort of the general different communities that they can now be involved and they can trust that they will be catered to.

**Carly Findlay** 17:42

I think the art sector is doing quite well for audiences, and has improved for audiences. But I don't think it's there for performers yet. I can speak from a Melbourne Fringe perspective, I work here. This is our venue. It's called common rooms, at trades Hall. And this stage is probably one of the only accessible stages. In Melbourne, we have a Moby lift, which is a lift that we can move. And people who are wheelchair users or who have mobility aids can get on and off the stage that way. And we have the backstage green room area, and we have some, you know, accessible toilets here. And I know that not all the places in Melbourne have that which, you know, I guess we are leading the way, I also think that perhaps openly to an audience, it appears accessible, but then some places their job applications might not be accessible or the positions might be exclusionary by way of needing to work full time or not have various options in how to apply. Again, I can I can speak to Melbourne Fringe, but we've got lots of ways to apply for a job or to apply for a grant here or access funding. But not everyone has that. And I also feel like perhaps while they're outwardly facing accessible to audiences, perhaps not every department in arts organisations do their best in Access. You know, particularly around content warnings or accessible content on social media, and even events I feel during the pandemic. Everyone needed to happen have events online because we were forced to stay at home. And now there's a perception that COVID is over which it isn't. It's still very, very prominent and prevalent and it impacts disabled people the most, and elderly people and vulnerable people, and so the funding has gone - to, you know - to make events accessible for online. The funding has gone there. The staff have gone and that the proof to continue that is often on, us the burden of proof. And it's a lot of work. And I guess, even to get this event online was tricky. And as I said, the way we're having it is, you know, recorded and then it will be post produced rather than digitally streamed.

**Grace Jarvis** 20:27

Sort of coming from that I found performing wise, often communities of artists have always been, like very accepting of disabilities. And I've, it's, it's, it seems to me quite often, the accessibility becomes more you like off it when it's at a professional level, as opposed to when like, I mean, I only speak for comedy, but when you start comedy, you do it for free, in basements, and I top pubs. And so that requires, I've, you know, I've had groups of comedians carry people in wheelchairs up off upstairs and onto stages and into venues and, you know, often as a, as a community, there's a lot of people who want to help, but it seems, you know, it seems like you really want it all to just be accessible to everyone, from the get go, without anyone having to be carried as an adult. Because that sucks. So I think when you get into like a professional level, when people care enough about your performance that you're being paid to be there, they'll make sort of make arrangements for you. But when you when you're starting out, no one is invested in you being there. So I think that can lead to people with disabilities feeling quite excluded. Because it's, um, it's harder to get there to be there to talk about stuff, you have to address stuff more often, as opposed to just standing there and being yourself. Yeah, I think and also, there's so much novelty of like, we have one interpreted night at the Comedy Festival, oh, like, we have you one night that's friendly for Autistic people, or we have one, you know, like a one off as opposed to the money being there for it to be every night. And any Disabled people could choose any night to show up. As opposed to having to, you know, use your schedule. So I think it's, it's, it's, it needs improvement in a lot of areas.

**Caroline Bowditch** 22:44

Amazing. There's some beautiful giggling happening in the background, which is very welcome. [Panelists laugh] And very joyous. Any other additions to this? I am really interested in that Grace. I think it's such an interesting point to think about. When we get to professional level, people might have also developed. There's a conversation at the moment happening about people having access riders. So you turn up to a gig. And already, the staff in a venue have got your access rider that says these are the things that I need when I'm in place here. Is that something that anyone on the panel has encountered or worked on? Carly? Yeah,

**Anniene Stockton** 23:34

Carly?

**Carly Findlay** 23:34

Yes. Yeah, I have one and just done that. I think what what you were saying then Grace, often when the Disabled person is performing or speaking or doing the thing, we also have to advocate for access needs, not just for us, but for everyone. And I, there's only outside of my job at Fringe. I work here two days a week. But outside of that I'm a freelance speaker, mostly, and a writer. And there's only been one event where I've actually been paid on top of my fee to do the access stuff. The rest of it. I've been the educator and it's a lot. You know, I published two books in the past three years, four years and all of that, I had to organise the access stuff, the publishers, the book shops, they didn't really know. And so it was on me. I have a rider I have an access rider. It's not like a rock and roll rider. It's actually like a nannarider. I guess. [Caroline laughs] I have a speaking agent and I have a writing agent. So I'm very lucky that I have people to advocate for me. So whenever they booked for me, they send my rider to the place that I'm speaking at and it has a blanket, a freezer pack or hotel room with a bath and nearly all the time I get this really flash enormous hotel room, which is pretty nice. I also have like air conditioning. Before COVID I didn't want to shake hands because my hands were being crushed mainly by old white men. And I don't want to shake hands now anyway. And recently I've had that I would like people at the events I do to be maksed, to wear near me, I have a mask exemption for a long period of time, and I try to wear masks where I can. But if I work for more than an hour or so my face kind of seizes up. And also, I always advocate for access for my audience as well. So I will say I would prefer this to be Auslan, interpreted wheelchair accessible, etc. And there had been I did an Opera House event, just before the pandemic hit or as the pandemic hit on the Eighth of March 2020. The Ruby Princess was docked next to the Opera House, so I probably got some COVID germs passing me. And my event was one of only two. Can we get you to speak much slower? Sorry. And louder? Yeah, so my event of the it was All About Women Festival at the Opera House and my event, maybe out of I don't know, 20 events on during the day, there was only two of them, that were Auslan interpreted, and livestream like they were my request. And as a result of that, which was great because people could access it. But as a result of that, it benefited me because someone was watching this from America. And they were a CNN editor, the editor at CNN. And then they asked me to write for CNN because they saw it because it was live stream. So access isn't just about benefiting disabled people, it reaches more markets, it's helps with opportunities. So that was good. But yeah, I think it's always up to us to ask, and I feel like they need to be more intuitive around that. The best thing that's been on my rider, which I didn't ask for, was this whole cheese platter. And then when I walked into the venue, Savage Garden was playing, I want that at every time. My Fringe bio says that I'm a lifelong Darren Hayes fan.

**Janice Florence** 27:06

Yeah, I think, it's Janice speaking, I think getting back to the education thing, you find you constantly have to do that. And some days you don't feel like it. It's a constant job. Really. Yeah. And also, I think, you know, I've noticed there's a sort of a priority kind of blindness thing. People who think are really great and nice and but somehow they just don't see the importance of things like say captioning. And you have to talk them into it. You know, they they think oh, well look, I'll get that done. On the second night, or, you know,

**Caroline Bowditch** 27:54

hang on I'm just gonna pause you for a sec because our captioning has dropped off. So in true honest style we're going to pause until we can get that restarted, sorry Janice. Hold that thought

**Unknown** 28:19

Want some water?

**Janice Florence** 28:20

I'm right thanks.

28:26

Lovely captioners. Are you back with us. Great Rght okay we're just refreshing a little getting some water . Anniene is being the host with the most. Great . Thank you. Okay. Janice, can you pick that thought up? Or?

**Janice Florence** 29:34

I was you're saying that there's a people just don't realize what they're saying when they say oh, is it okay if we have the captions done by the second night or third night? It's just an it's it makes me aware of a sort of blindness that doesn't see that a whole lot of people are being excluded by doing things like that. And it's, you know, just almost an assumed thing that you come across. Oh, yeah. And it's like they're throwing in a privilege, if they provide us land? Well, we can't do it this time, you know, we'll do it next time. There's always questions of money. But, you know, there's ways of planning for that. So, sometimes, you know, you have to sort of rub along with people. But I feel a deep outrage when I think about that, because I think in a way those that load of thought that comes from way back is still sort of there and it's quite unconscious.

**Caroline Bowditch** 30:44

It makes me think of a word that has to be in this space. And that word is ableism. And whether we see that as playing out as a form of ableism. And for anyone that is unfamiliar with the term of ableism, essentially, it is discrimination that one experiences on the basis of disability, it can be systemic, it can be direct, it can be indirect, it can be constant, it can be infrequent, it can almost be invisible, but it is very alive and well, within the art sector and within our society. And I'm wondering if we can, if anyone is willing or happy to share When you've experienced it. You don't have to disclose names of where it was, but But yeah, how it played out. And I think there's something really important without wanting to traumatize anybody, but just that thing about how it's impacted how it impacted on you, in a way that you might not have known at the moment either, but it emerged at some later stage.

**Anniene Stockton** 32:18

I mean, here, I can take that one. I have experienced ableism, mostly around when I have requested simple access at large, let's say triple A fully funded arts events when I have been an invited person to a program launch. And the seating was only available for VIPs. And when I requested a seat at the beginning of the ceremony, when half the VIPs had not shown up, I was told I was not allowed to have a seat as I was not a VIP, and that I should go sit on the stairs.

**Caroline Bowditch** 33:13

And we're not disclosing names. [Panel and audience laughs]

**Anniene Stockton** 33:15

Now, what's interesting is that this is one of many venues that claim to be accessible. This is one of many venues that have existed for a very long time and get large chunks of arts funding, not just for their programming, but for their infrastructure. And it is one of many venues that have spent literally the last 20 years implementing little to no access they have done nothing to upgrade any of their facilities and it is always placed in the too hard basket. My observation even prior to my acquired disability is that those in charge are signal virtue signaling and have done for as long as I can remember and continue to do so. And they do not consult with disabled artists or disabled practitioners. They do not get disabled artists or practitioners onto their boards and they do not examine them. To policies. And when they supposedly are making changes, there is no one involved with lived experience. And there is almost a patronizing, parental answer attitudes, and a too hard basket attitude, which I want to say, as a person who has independently and self funded the vast majority of the work I have produced since the late 1990s. That is trash and false. And they are wasting money and resources and being lazy with their privilege. The end.

**Janice Florence** 36:03

Yes, I often think that the world in general has made a lot of money out of not providing access. ]Caroline laughs] There's a lot of money that they should have spent on access that they haven't spent. And then they kind of see it as a difficulty that when they do start to think about it, and have to spend it.

**Caroline Bowditch** 36:28

Can I ask a follow up question, and it's such a good point that you make is that. And I feel like we have this conversation a lot about small, independent, small to medium organisations are much more likely to create access, then the big organisations, and I would just love your input on whether that's is that generally our experience, or is that something that I have imagined? It's conjured up.

**Liel Bridgford** 37:05

Liel, it's Liel speaking. I think it's both. I mean, I think like to Grace's point, a lot of venues, especially for emerging artists that are completely non accessible. And some of the big venues can claim to be accessible, but have a lot of ableism within them. Sorry, I wasn't here for the previous question. But I did want to share a recent story that I went as an audience member to a very big arts venue. And I went with a friend, and we were in an accessible seat. And firstly, it took me about it took us a while to book seats as well, not through the same way as a non disabled person would have to book which is also not accessible. Like if you have to call a separate number, and wait on hold for three hours. Whereas a non disabled person can just book it online within two minutes. I think that's really ablest and very disrespectful of our time, as well. And what happened in the venue was, as I walked in, and was told by one of the people who are looking at the tickets, or when this happens, it means the show is about to end. And I think he was trying to help me. But I felt that he was kind of ruining the experience for me already. And then as the show was still happening, and it's in the dark as an audience member, I felt someone touching me suddenly, and he tapped on my shoulders to tell me, basically that we should get out because we were gonna use the left. The show is not finished yet. And so I guess that's where we think, you know, big organisations that he's, you know, I guess advertising themselves is wheelchair accessible, when that's a tick. There's way more work to be done. And that was as a, you know, you can imagine as well, I mean, it was in the dark, it was touch suddenly, without any notice that was extremely unsettling.

**Caroline Bowditch** 39:06

I think just picking up on that, too, there's something really important about the access we often think about is the physical access. That's what people think about when they conjure up access. And we know that a tiny percentage of the disability community are permanent wheelchair users. And we know that physical access is super important. 75% of the disability community will have some form of physical impairment, whatever that might be. But there's, that doesn't mean that they're a wheelchair user. And I think there's something Yeah, I just wonder if we can talk about the bits that we leave out and I think our Yep,

**Penny Pollard** 39:55

it's Penny here. I studied my BA Gold and Silver Smith, so at RMIT, and it was quite a while ago. But yes, it was the first time I'd come back to university with profound hearing loss. And so it was me, it was all on me to have to understand what that meant in that space. So I went to the disability hub. And I had a lot of support while I had support from them as in notetakers. But one of the key things are remembers seeing the head of department, your one on one meeting, and I'm having my note taker, and he's speaking to the note taker. So it's just a little reminder, I wanted to give everyone that don't do that. Speak to me, or the person who you're there to have a conversation with not the interpreter or the note taker, just build up a little key ableist things just diminish you so constantly, and even the workshop, you know, I need to see visuals, all the desks are facing the wall. And it's dangerous and distressing, that, and even the jokes that we all chat about doing your work at the bench, I eventually don't hear anything of the joke. So you're just isolated profoundly. So I just had one experience that was positive. Two women from Estonia came in third year. And we're having a very small conversation of group of six people. And I just touched her and said, What are we talking about? And she could just easily say, dogs, they're just talking about dogs, to put it in context. And to just respect me so smoothly, just little things like that just matter a lot.

**Janice Florence** 41:55

Thank you, I think the needs of neurodivergent people neglected a lot. I just heard a story from somebody the other day, at a certain large gallery in the CBD [Caroline whispers "Carn you work it out?"] And she there was someone trying to be helpful, which you often encounter. And she was with a group of people with similar needs. And she said, we can't, you know, this is, yeah, we can't go through the foyer, it's too confusing. It's too noisy. It's just really off putting. And so he said, "Oh, well, okay, we can go down this way". But down this way, there was a bunch of other spot where parents could put pushers and things. So there was a bunch of people doing that with their pushers. And he said, "make way make way. Special Needs group coming through". And so you know, that kind of, yeah, that sort of attitude, uneducated attitude. And also, you know, I have had this feedback from various people that big, noisy, bright situations at the entrance are really hard to deal with, and really put people off trying to go to those places. And of course, those needs also have to be considered for artists, with with those access needs.

**Grace Jarvis** 43:35

I think also, when, when access needs are like, you have to ask, you have to sort of put yourself out and go I need this, I need help in order to enjoy this. I feel like it, it really doubles some internalised ableism as well. Like when things are just all that all the options are there and all the excess needs are met and you can just use them if you need them and don't use them if you don't, I think internalized ableism is really improved by stuff like that. I might my venue for the Comedy Festival this year. As a great venue. I loved it so much but the lift was very very slow. So it was like only for people who with access needs otherwise no one's gonna get to the show in time because there's so many people that have to get up there. And I have a chronic pain condition at the time I can't remember what I had done something I'd subluxed something in my hips. I was having very bad hip pain and, and I shouldn't have been taking this test. And I was because I didn't want to put myself out there as someone with with access needs because I was a you just watched me stand on stage for an hour and I don't look you know, like I needed that kind of help. And my my parents who came to the show eventually would like would watch me try and take the stairs and be like "No, no, she's she's taking the lift. she's not hurting herself more doing this. And it was, it was It felt kind of isolating to watch my entire audience walk past me as I waited for the lift and have them go, oh, well, we just watched her stand, you know, she doesn't look like she needs needs this lift. And I was like I don't I, you know, I can walk down the stairs, it's fine. But it was not, you know, it was only going to damage me further in, in this internalised ableism of like," no, no, I'm not, I'm not disabled enough. I'm not disabled in the right way to need this". And as opposed to if it had just been, you know, everyone can access what they need. And there's no, I think there's like a judgment you put on other sometimes you put a judgment in other people's brains, it's not even there some of the time, because of how it's an outlier. For your needs. And things like I had a, I had to have a note taker for exams in high school and university and stuff because I had a dislocated wrist for most of it. And it was so isolating to just be like in a different room with another person, like so obvious. And especially as a teenager, you feel so like, Everyone's looking at me all the time. Like that sort of stuff, where it's if if if access requirements are just not a big deal. You, I feel like internally feel a lot better about yourself as well. Which is, I feel like a part of it, when you're always advocating when you're always saying, standing up and saying this is what I need. This is, you know, I'm this, when someone just is all about it. From the get go, you have to battle with yourself a little less, I guess, if that's relatable.

**Carly Findlay** 46:36

I've been thinking about that, from an audience perspective, not as an artist perspective. And for me, my skin condition means that I look the same every day, I'm always read people either assume I'm in pain, or assume I'm sunburn, and it's gonna go away, or I'm not in pain. And so when I requested a seat, particularly at CES, like seeing a band, there's often drunk or intoxicated people there and they'll refuse to give me a seat. I find that really hard, I find bad stuff, not recognising what ableism is really hard. They might recognise what sexism is, but they certainly don't recognise what ableism looks like. And so that can really hamper it. And also, this happened the other day, actually, I saw a Fringe show, which was amazing. They're actually playing this weekend, I'll give them a plug. It was Emotion 21. And they did a show called Sunder. And they're also playing again this weekend. I believe it Abbotswood Convent again. And it was the performance trouple of performance.

**Anniene Stockton** 47:35

Carly

**Carly Findlay** 47:35

Yes,

**Anniene Stockton** 47:36

slower.

**Carly Findlay** 47:37

Sorry. It was the performance troupe of people with Down syndrome. And I was sitting next to someone and I was, you know, saying how do you know, you know, what brings you here? How do you know the performers and and they made a really ableist comment, you know, and so enduring those kinds of ableist attitudes, when there are disabled performers on stage, that can be really hard, you know, they said, oh, years ago, people would have been locked up. And I said, they still are, you know, and I'm really glad that people have had their had the opportunity to perform in a public space. You know, I added that, but I also added, people still are in institutions. But you know, you have to endure that when you talk about disability art, and I find that really hard. And also, I guess the idea that, you know, that I said before, you know, people don't think I'm disabled, and so they don't think I have access needs. And the other thing I wanted to say is, I'm definitely finding COVID Safety has impacted access needs for me. And for other people, my body doesn't regulate its temperature. And so when we have to have a lot of breezes go through because of ventilation, I am freezing. And when we have to have outdoor events, they often can't go. And so I find that, I find that to be tricky. Absolutely. I get COVID safety, but I also hate feeling uncomfortable and pained when there's freezing cold conditions or hot conditions.

**Anniene Stockton** 49:02

I think that also points out that access is extremely complex. And that sometimes one access need comes into conflict with a different access need. And this also plays back to the lack of infrastructure and the stagnation of infrastructure. So with ventilation, it's three years and there is no policy. There is no action plan for refurbishing and properly ventilating public and private buildings. And its public health safety. And it's access.

**Caroline Bowditch** 49:49

Yeah. It's amazing. And frustrating. I am going to pause us there because I think it's a good place to pause. We're going to take a 10 minute break. And when we come back, we're going to talk about allyship. So we've told you all the things that are horrible about the world. And now we're going to talk about how you can be involved in making it better. So we'll come back at ten past three, feel free to hang in this room, there are toilets, out these main doors to the right and down the corridor. There is also a chill space at the back for anyone who might just want to be a little, there's also a balcony space, and there's also tea and coffee on the side. So please make yourselves comfortable and welcome here. See you at 10 past.

**Transcript – part two**

This is the transcript for part two of the Radical Access Provocations for Change event at the 2022 Melbourne Fringe Festival – held on 11 October 2022.

**Caroline Bowditch** 00:00

[The interpreters have gone as they're not needed due to no Deaf people in the room.] It's good interpreter etiquette. Thanks, people got cup of tea. How are we going with the older? Captions? We look like we're all okay. I think we did some captioning troubleshooting in the break as well. So thank you. Welcome back to my panelists and to all of you hope you all got a little cup of tea, pounded your noses did whatever you needed to. As promised, we're gonna move on to thinking about ally ship for the next little while, and I suppose my first question, and it very much leads on from where we got to at the end of the last section. And my question, I suppose, and again, it feels quite closed, but I'm going to ask it anyway. Do you think people in power in the art sector, in general, are good allies to Disabled artists, and Disabled arts workers? We had an audience member who just suggested that the answer to that is no. But any of the panelists that want to share it, where maybe we could invite you

**Carly Findlay** 01:23

When we were planning this meeting, we anointed projects and programs manager, Danny, Danny Delahunty. For a number of friends. Sorry, Danny, I'm gonna reimburse you. As the model ally, he's very good.

**Caroline Bowditch** 01:36

And do you want to describe a bit about why we get that because we all collectively did that in that meeting?

**Carly Findlay** 01:42

Yeah.

**Caroline Bowditch** 01:43

What was it about what Danny was doing? For anyone that was in that meeting that might want to share with us?

**Anniene Stockton** 01:51

I think the big things Danny did was hold space. Without taking space, I think is the key element. The other is Danny is not a look down upon people person. There was a sincere giving and respect forour work our space. And Danny concentrated on us, I guess, and there was no, there was no Oh, look at me, and I being a good ally. And I think there are too many people who claim to be allies, but virtue signaling. And Danny doesn't virtue signal, Danny just does.

**Carly Findlay** 03:05

I think to take the focus off Danny, because I know he's embarrassed. I think a good ally, has access on their mind all the time. And from the very, very start, and it's not retrofitted into the process. It's budgeting for it's talking to funders. It's prioritising Deaf and Disabled staff members as well. And it is also going into advocate when it's sometimes too hard for Deaf and Disabled people to do that. You know, sometimes I find it hard to speak up, you know, because I'm always speaking up and up, you can become seen as the squeaky wheel or annoying or difficult. And so to have an ally on side to say, Hey, have you thought of this access? Or can you can you make this accessible? I think that's a really important thing, and then making space stepping aside and doing that. Yeah,

**Janice Florence** 04:08

Yes, I think the stepping aside things really important. Really being open and listening to what people need because there's loads of assumptions around what people think people need. So I've had some experience with that in my work with adults access with different arts organisations. And that's very refreshing. And also when they take on loads of consultation from people with different kinds of lived experience, having their you know, focus groups and discussion groups, and really taking on board actually creating programs through that consultation.

**Caroline Bowditch** 04:52

And really significantly paying people to be part of those consultations, and really valuing the knowledge which that people are bringing to those spaces rather than just kind of thinking, "Well, we're going to give you the space to tell us what we can be doing better", but actually acknowledging that wisdom, and bringing people.

**Janice Florence** 05:11

There is long history of people, Deaf or Disabled people not being paid for their expertise, and advice in the past, people kind of think it would be nice for them to get out and say a few words. And so they...

**Caroline Bowditch** 05:27

Give them a cup of tea.

**Janice Florence** 05:30

Yeah, that.

**Carly Findlay** 05:31

The other thing, I think, also, sorry Janice, I think it's important about how you receive feedback around in accessibility as an ally. Every time I raise ableist language, with friends, particularly. And these are friends in the art sector, I take a breath and think, Is this person still going to be my friend afterwards? Because I would say, nine times out of 10 people get defensive, and their right to use ableist language trumps Disabled people's right to be safe, or seems to. And so it is how you receive it. So saying, "Thank you, I did not know this, I will do better next time" is a great way of receiving that rather than "Well, it's just a word, language has evolved. I'm not using it towards a Disabled person, so it doesn't matter". Yeah..

**Liel Bridgford** 06:24

Yes, Liel speaking, I just wanted to add to what everyone else was saying. I think that also allysihp, you there's two things about it. To add these one is a commitment. And I think it requires the ally to be committed to being an ally 100% of the time. And I think allyship is a verb. So it's something that you have to do all of the time. And it is about unlearning. First of all, unlearning, all of the ableism that we all have. So the first step is actually acknowledging that you all every single person in this room will have ableism ,attitudes inside of us, because that is the society that we grow up in and live in every day. So we have to unlearn it, and then learn new ways of treating Disabled people. And then we can actually do the work of making things accessible and equitable. Yeah.

**Penny Pollard** 07:21

Penny. For me, one thing that was quite important was been asked what do I need in different places, and often, I have no fucking idea what I need. And then I realise it relates to the caption in the caption is having to listen to all the different voices. So could you fathom for a moment, I have a cochlear implant, and I had a hearing aid and now I'm getting a second cochlear implant, I'm trying to focus on all the different types of voices. And the way we speak is really difficult and in different venues. So it's to also for you to do some research you to kind of actually remember what I say, or for me to not always be the one to have to, I need this, can you do this? Even? You're saying, Oh, can you speak a bit slower? Can you speak a bit faster, all those allies, that's really important. And to touch on what you said, it's very much an angry a lot, like a lot. And I'm working on that. But for allies, and anyone working with people to understand our internalised oppression, how it's there, and it affects us and it comes up for Caroline to talk about being uncomfortable, that will come up and I'll suddenly cry or be really distressed and not understand why so for allies to respect the difference, dare I say, to understand that we are different and the same and to give that space.

**Anniene Stockton** 09:11

I mean, speaking and in that understanding that we are all traumatised as Disabled people, and with ableism we are being re traumatised. And we are being expected to play nice and play safe and to pat the head and sues the ego and the guilt and shame of the ableist. So we're being traumatised again. And look, when you get called out for doing something that is ableist or Any form of bigotry? Yes, those feelings of shame and embarrassment, there are a lot. What makes you a growing, evolving human is acknowledging those feelings, understanding them, moving through them. And then seeing how you can change as a person and having the courage to do so. And when you have that courage, you will be pleasantly surprised by the amount of people who support you in becoming a better person.

**Caroline Bowditch** 10:46

Absolutely,

**Grace Jarvis** 10:47

I think, coming off Penny, coming off what you were saying? My favorite thing in the world is when someone says a non Disabled person is like, "Would it be helpful if I asked someone for this"? Or "would it be helpful if I, if I put myself between you and being the difficult? You know, the outlier? If I asked for this?" And would it... because you're right questions like, What do you need a so... Complicated? And like, it's so such a stressful question. Because I'm like, I don't know, I don't want to need anything. I don't want to be a bother. I don't want anyone to think of me as the person who is, you know, a tricky act, because then maybe they won't book me anymore. And maybe, you know, I don't want to be "difficult" in quotation marks. But when, when an ally or non Disabled person is like, "Would it be helpful if I asked for this access requirement, if I asked for this and didn't point to you and said, well, Grace needs, if I just asked, you know, if I just put myself in that position, would that help?" Which is so much nicer than having to advocate for yourself. Or having to figure out the answer to the question, "what do I need?" Or, you know, just having another person be like, "I'm willing to go to bat for you, and not put your name on that bat". Which, you know, I think is, is, I think, sometimes easier than one would expect, and not what people think, because I think often when people think about allyship, it requires such a big - I think that it looks like it requires big actions and and you know, doing huge tasks, whereas it's often just asking a simple question, and then asking a second person, that simple question.

**Caroline Bowditch** 12:40

Yeah. I think a quandary that I'm in at the moment, is, as you have so beautifully articulated Grace, it's that thing about how do we ensure that Disabled people have a voice? But that aren't the ones doing all the heavy lifting? And so there's a thing about not wanting other people to speak for us on behalf of us. But how, how can we get that? In between? I don't have an answer for myself. But it's the thing that I'm kind of grappling with at the moment is this thing about being really conscious of, of the load that we carry? That every one of us in life is doing more than one job, so we're doing our job. And then alongside that job, we're also doing the job of educating whoever we come in contact with answering all sorts of questions, ensuring everyone's access has met, like, all those things we're doing. Just because of the joyous bodies that we find ourselves in. And, yeah, so I don't have an answer. But it's, it's something that I'm trying to kind of work out where I am with it at the moment.

**Grace Jarvis** 13:54

This is Grace. Again, it also seems to be a lot of like, requirement for Disabled people to do a lot of big speeches. Or it's like "I have to now. Alright, here I go. Here's my speech. I'm going to tell you my my things, because you guys don't know them. And someone has to tell you", and that is a lot of like, a lot of work to be doing. Like I had a gig a while ago where I at the beginning, I did a joke about being Autistic. And I was like anybody else Autistic in the crowd? And one guy was like, yep. And I was like, cool. So I knew there was an autistic person in the crowd. And then I did something else. And I said another joke. And he said to his friend, I don't understand. He said it in a way that was like, I didn't, I didn't get the I didn't get the joke. And the crowd laughed at him. And it was like, I, I don't want to be the person that suddenly like, hey, let's not all laugh at the one Autistic man in the room. But you know, I don't want to ruin the vibe, but I'm also like, it's also a very easy solution, because I can just say, Oh, well, this is this is the joke like Oh, Just say it. I'll just explain to him and he'll be like, Oh, great. I got it. And as opposed to suddenly, he's the enemy of the vibe, which is not. I don't want to and I don't want to, you know, it's tricky because sometimes you're like, I don't want to get on my soapbox right now, because I'm just in the middle of doing my 10 minute spot. And it's nearly done. I don't want to yell at you. But also, I wish we weren't all laughing at this one Disabled person. Because he asked a very reasonable question very politely like he wasn't heckling. You didn't yell out? He had a very genuine question that was easily answered. Like I don't think that should be punished. But also, I don't want to always have to do the speech.

**Carly Findlay** 15:47

It is hard always being on. It's Carly. I did a Melbourne Writers Festival event a few years ago, with Maxine Beneba. Clarke and two other people from Growing up African in Australia. I'm a contributor to that book. And we were talking about we were talking to school students in Year 11 and 12, I think. And we we were talking about how sometimes the things that we say around our identity, our Disabled identity, or that was specifically around the African identity. But I brought it back to Disabled identity because it was relevant for me. We often say that they can be things that jeopardies our future work. And someone a student had asked that great question. And I said, I did an event a radio interview a few years ago, on the ABC, where a radio presenter was very inappropriately asking me questions. And I had the radio presenters said on on it, your face would be difficult at Halloween, it wouldn't be a good thing at Halloween. And there are a couple of people in the audience who laughed. And I stopped. And I said, "Hey, that's not for laughing at". And they sniggered and, you know, whatever. And I went back to talking. And afterwards, I afterwards, when Maxine and I were in the signing queue, we were then accosted by these young men from the school to lecture us on race. They were two white men, young men. And I tweeted about it. And then my tweets ended up on the Andrew Bolt show, which is great. So it's hard because you're doing your job as a writer or speaker or artist, however, and then when you go and call out the ableism, that happens within the show, it becomes something else, it becomes another performance. And then there's like the spectators that look on to see you taking on those, you know, that ableist kind of situation. And that can be hard because then that's focused on and and similar. You know, with that radio interview, the thing became about the ableism, from the presenter and how I was supposed to react, you know, I just sat there and sort of laughed it off and then reacted afterwards. But it was a lot of well, why didn't you walk out? Imagine if I'd walked out? Like, you know, Yassmin Abdel Magied got bullied out of the country for speaking up. If I'd walked out, I probably would have never worked on ABC again. And you know, it did take a long time. But it becomes that spectator thing when people are watching how you're gonna react if you don't react at your best. And if you don't like as Anniene said, pat them on their head and hold their hand through the ableism they've caused you, then you're the bad Disabled person.

**Caroline Bowditch** 18:35

Yeah. This conversation, and it may be for others in the audience as making me think about Stella Young, and the fact that Stella based so much of her comedy, on the ableism that she experienced on a daily basis. And yeah, I think it's really interesting to if you're not, I think there's a lot of things that happen for people about the asking for what we need. I meet a lot of people who have invisible disabilities, who will come to me after something and say, I'm Disabled, but I haven't told my employer. And there's something incredibly powerful in that, but really makes me think, will we ever get to a place where we can talk about access as a fact, just like he would talk about it as a technical requirement? So I need a microphone, I need a stall. I need an accessible stage. And without apology, will we ever get to a stage where we can just talk about access as a fact and not feel like it's going to be a negative like it's.. So that's a question but I think, and I think also this thing about... Yeah, being conscious of the consequences of not being that one that goes "[laughs] You're so funny. I've never heard that joke before, ever". Yeah. It happens. all the time

**Janice Florence** 20:19

Like "you need a horn on that thing".

**Caroline Bowditch** 20:21

Yeah. Or, slow down. Don't go too fast.

**Janice Florence** 20:23

It's like drunk driving.

**Caroline Bowditch** 20:25

Fuck off. Find something else to do with your time. Yeah, it's just really interesting. When? When will when will we get past that? I don't know the answer to that question. But it sounds like you're gonna add something really juicy to this conversation?

**Anniene Stockton** 20:42

Oh, Anniene, speaking, I was about to say that, when you mentioned the employer not knowing about disability. Prior to my acquired disability, I, apart from working in the arts, I also worked in the disability sector as a support worker. And then I had a few different freelance gigs and contract gigs. And then my accident happened. And obviously, my support worker career was over. The other work within the arts, though, shouldn't have been over. Just some very simple adjustments, access needs to be met. And I could have continued with that work. But I was basically shadow fired. Just not called not, emails not returned, and suddenly, no shifts available. For me. I even had someone say something about funding, but then they employ two people like a month later. I also have experienced a huge amount of ableism, around getting work outside of the art sector. My access needs are actually not very complex. And in fact, COVID has proven my access needs are very simple. And even more can be done - around flexible hours working from home, doing remote work, having different digital tools, more of a focus on my productivity, being around completion of tasks, and implementing actions, et cetera, over hours spent at a desk. And I also have experienced [ableism] where I would audition. I started auditioning again for shows performing. And I had a couple of separate occasions where the director picked me for the role. And the producers said no, because they thought my disability would be a problem. Now, obviously, that's a huge amount of ableism. And it's not just as a performer, but as a producer of 25 years. That's fucking bullshit. And I think I just, even before my disability, I was embedding access, I have always had Disabled artists, abled artists that I work with technicians. And just, there's always this glitch that occurs in my mind when other people can't do it, especially when they have money. And we need to getting back to allyship, when you see that happening. Call it out. Get your friends to call it out, get your family members to call it out. When communities of people start calling this stuff out, change can actually occur.

**Caroline Bowditch** 24:25

And the best way to call it out is to take your money somewhere else and let them know that you're taking your money somewhere else.

**Anniene Stockton** 24:32

Here here.

**Caroline Bowditch** 24:36

 I want to move on to the another really important thing of allyship, which is around trust. And I think there's some major work to be done by the art sector to build people's trust. Build the disability community's trust when they advertise events as being accessible in whatever form. Because I don't know that we believe it right? I think we're told, but then do we really believe that it's gonna happen? So I think there is, I think that we have trust issues with the sector. What do you think would be useful? Or what do we need? Sorry, Grace, I'm gonna ask question, what what would be needed for from the arts sector to build a level of trust with the Deaf and Disability community required for true ally ship to develop?

**Carly Findlay** 25:39

I think in my five years of being at Melbourne Fringe, for almost five years, sorry, it's Carly. I've seen that trust has been slow to build. And then when we've built it, it can be easy to break. Because trust requires something to happen repetitively, constantly, to show that we are constantly committed. And so one of the things that I really said during the pandemic was great, you know, everyone needed it, because we're all at home with digital access. But then when when we came back to the office, when we came back out of our homes, and digital access wasn't a priority, I was worried that we would break the trust of our audiences. And so you know, I put it that way, we have to continue providing some digital access, because we need to keep the trust of our artists and audiences.

**Janice Florence** 26:34

Yeah, I think, generally speaking, I think, again, it has to be built over time. And it has to be proven over time. Because people can say they've got they're offering something and they're actually not. And also, new staff can come along, who don't have the same awareness and knowledge. And so trust in organisations can be broken that way. It really is something building over time. And people, as we said, before, being willing to learn and being really open to learning. Because when you confront when I'm, you know, somebody comes along and sees me. They, they're flawed assumptions, often. And so you sort of have to deal with that battery of assumptions. Anyway, I think education is an important thing within organisations. Because you have all sorts of people working for you, you have front of house staff, you have volunteers, it really needs to be spread through all those levels. Because if I come across an attitude, say with a volunteer, it kind of puts me off the whole organisation, which is totally unreasonable. But it does have the effect. Yeah, that you haven't been scrupulous enough in providing access.

**Liel Bridgford** 28:08

Liel speaking. I think, continuing on, from what you're saying as well. For that to happen, we need Disabled leaders in every arts organisation, every single one, just like you wouldn't expect, you wouldn't accept an organisation that doesn't have format women in there. Don't accept organisations without Disabled people in there, full stop. It's impossible to create full access and full equity without that happening. And in order to do that, we need to make the job applications accessible, as Carly was saying, and we needtrue allyship. And we need that in every art sector we needed in publishing the amount of books that are read that have able to slurs in them, I just want to throw them across the room and I just I am so angry.

**Carly Findlay** 28:56

I have done. I have thrown books across the room.

**Liel Bridgford** 29:00

Yeah. Yeah. That is

**Grace Jarvis** 29:05

I, I also think, often, when even when there are acts like this often, accessibility, even when there are like good accessibility options, they are often at a higher level. They're often for people who have, I don't know, proved themselves in a way. And I think that Disabled people should be allowed to be bad at stuff. Like they should be allowed to start at the bottom and have those excess needs met from day one. So that it's not like, oh, that person is like, doing all of this extra work to prove that they're just as good as everybody else. When they should be allowed. They should be allowed to be bad at stuff, like you should be allowed to be there and try it and do a, you know, a bad audition or a bad first set or you know, and still have those access requirements met you shouldn't have Have to be exceptional and already, you know, an incredible artist to have those things met for you that you shouldn't have to prove that people want you around before anyone will make those things, you know, accessible?

**Caroline Bowditch** 30:17

Because how do you be the best that you can be if your access is not being met?

**Grace Jarvis** 30:23

Yeah, exactly. If you're not, if you're not, from day one, getting access needs met to try and be good at a thing, then it's you're already, you know, you've already got a big brick on you.

**Penny Pollard** 30:37

I think, it's Penny here, a true ally steps side or moves aside so Disabled or Deaf get the jobs. We don't have to constantly fight to get enough. We need to be given positions of importance and power. Because once we have that, we are seen, or we're shown or we're there, and we are respected. And it slowly builds that up, that we have such internalised ableism that we don't necessarily.... I constantly fight to respect to myself or to show, because I hide my disability so well, my Deafness so well, I was born hearing, and I'm profoundly Deaf woman. Now I'm not part of the Deaf community. And I don't have a Deaf accent. I speak eloquently. And I have Master's degrees, but it's very difficult to find work, or to present myself easily. Because people forget and even when I do, it's, I need this, this and this. Okay, and then it's gone again. So if someone tells you they need something, continue it. And to have someone ally in the room say, what didn't you said they're actually asking for me. So they're presenting that support unexpected ways is so helpful, or not helpful. It's just needed and a benefit.

**Caroline Bowditch** 32:15

It's not having to tell the story 75,000 times

**Carly Findlay** 32:21

And not being seen as a risk. Before I worked in the arts, I worked for the government and my dream job, can you believe it was to work at Workplace Diversity at the Tax Office, that was my dream job [Caroline laughs], I saw the light. And I remember going to meet with the head of Workplace Diversity, who was an old white man who didn't appear to be Disabled. And he said that I would be too passionate to work there. And so that was the start of me getting out. And I did send him an email that ensured I'd probably never work there again. But I think that and I think of you know, what a risk I was seen to be and just how much Disabled people are seen to be annoying, or, you know, insufferable, as I've been called, because we speak up

**Anniene Stockton** 33:16

Anniene speaking. We're seen as a burden, an inconvenience. And this is one of the key pillars of ableism and is a carryover from modern civilisation, hundreds of years of culture, and governmental policy, religious doctrine. And people, a lot of people actually don't realise that as a Disabled person, right up to the late 70s. You were imprisoned in institutions. You legally had no rights you were handed over to the state just 40 years ago, it only started to be dismantled in the 80s. That big push the watershed moment, and this person is known to most people in the disability sector, Annie McDonald. She was trapped shortly after birth, in St. Nicholas, on Rathdowne Street, opposite the museum, placed there because of the medical structure of disability. She had Athetoid Cerebral Palsy, which meant she was in constant movement and non verbal. This apparently meant that she had no mental capacity. I had the utter privilege and joy to call Annie one of my beloved friends, and she was one of the most articulate, sassy, fierce, intelligent humans, I have known. She only escaped St. Nicholas, at the age of 18 when she went to the Supreme Court and claimed habeas corpus, aka, I'm being trapped in the tower by the Crown. This is 40 years ago, it's it. It sounds semi whimsical and a little funny and a little dark. But this is the reality of policy in Australia. And while a lot of this has been dismantled a lot of these structures and restrictions around Disabled people, and the remnants of that control is still in place in large sectors of our society. And we need to remember that whilst most people here don't know if this experience, you were brought up in a culture that was completely shaped by it, that there are still many doctors air quotes in the medical profession who believes that Annie was lacking in mental capacity. And I can tell you now, as a person with ADHD and Dyslexia, when we spoke with her communication board, her spelling was perfect. And there is this assumption from society that comes also in large part from the medical profession, and from government policy, that is still very dangerous. And a key part of allyship is knowing this exists, acknowledging it exists. And when you see it, pushing back.

**Carly Findlay** 37:20

Yeah, I have something to add on that I was thinking about. The government, particularly not my dream job in the Tax Office, but how the government with the NDIS with Job Access, which is providing people support to be in workplaces, and with the Disability Support Pension, so three arms, there; they don't see disability art as meaningful work. And so when I get questions from Disabled people and their support workers around how people can use the NDIS, to participate in Melbourne Fringe, as an artist or as an audience member, and I talk to the NDIS, or an NDIS provider, no one can tell me because they don't see art as a job. And so I think it's really important that the government raise their expectations around disability and what art is art isn't therapy isn't only therapy, it can be therapy for people. But it is a job for many Disabled people. And we need to change that I think creative Victoria are doing a really good job in leading the way but federally, we are behind and that needs to change. And I would really like to take some of the points from this discussion to the government to Minister Tony Burke and and Bill Shorten to hopefully work in conjunction because he's the NDIS Minister Tony Burke, the Arts Minister, and realise and recognise our potential as arts workers as artists and audiences and be better funded, and we should have access funding should not come out of our creative budget, either. We need to be that needs to be set aside.

**Grace Jarvis** 39:03

Absolutely. I I was in school very recently, like I graduated from high school in 2015. University in 2018. Like I'm quite young, and I'm sure institutions I'm sure schools and institutions have improved a lot. But I had a similar experience where people couldn't understand that I was Disabled because I wasn't lacking mental capacity. Like I just would have teachers all the time being like you're smart. Why do you need you have great grades? Why do you need I was like, Well, it's because my wrist is dislocated. I'm speaking to you perfectly like I have no issues connecting you know, I can write perfectly but my hand won't work. So I need I need a middle person and they would forget daily like every day I would come back and they would be like, "Oh, you're still Disabled". Yes. I was Disabled yesterday. I'm Disabled today. It continues! And I have a you know I have a chronic pain condition, that means different parts of me dislocate, which would mean that they would think I was lying, or that I, you know, you've just got anxiety and it'd be like, Well, it's because because my knee hurt today, and it was my hips last week, what does that combine, it just means that I've got different parts of me that don't work. It has nothing to do with my grades or my access to education. And they and I went to a private school and all girls school, which is a problem in itself. This is not the area, but single sex education should be illegal. But they, they wanted to be out so desperately, they wanted me to not be their problem so badly, and my parents fought them all that constantly all through high school being like, she doesn't need that much like compared, you know, it's not even a huge amount of access requirements she needs, she needs so little for her to thrive. And you won't give her that, because you can't see her as a Disabled person, because she can speak at you and yell at you at this point. At this point, she's screaming at the pasta. But you know, they, there's a real weird gap in institutions and education between intelligence and disability that is still there. I just, you know, as a young person, I would like to say it's still there. I only just got out of school.

**Caroline Bowditch** 41:27

Amazing. If the panelists are happy, I would like to turn our attention to our lovely audience. And I have a question about fi all of you, any of you about? What's steps might you take, or are you going to take to build trust, to a point where you can start to carry the weight of change? Just a little question. You know, we've got five minutes before we need to wrap up. But I'm just interested from all the generous, generous wisdom that you've heard from the panelists, what, what do you feel like you can do to help us carry the weight of ableism, to short circuit it to change the way we live in the world's to improve the art sector? And we've got a roving mic to get. And can you introduce yourself?

**Georgia - Yuck Circus** 42:37

Sit down? You guys alright with that. Hi, I'm Georgia, I might do this. It's not my fault. How's it going? I'm an artist, I direct and produce Yuck Circus. We are a West Australian company, I really resonated with what you guys were saying about kind of tokenism. And also positions of power as an independent company, like we try our hardest to create accessible events. But it's so expensive. And it's also limiting in the sense that we do have like, we have like a one Auslan session on Thursday, like come on down, like googling like Deaf netball, Australia, like if excess, someone please everyone come. And it's like, it's so frustrating, because we want every session to be accessible and not just Auslan interpreted, but as many accessible as we possibly can. But it's almost unreasonable to ask that of us. And so I think from this, I'm going to get back on I would say my high horse, I don't know the metaphor for it, I'm gonna be doing this a lot. Not so much for over here. There's other Fringe Festivals that were involved with other festivals, where they're stoked that we're providing the one accessible session and they'll advertise it and say they're an accessible Festival at our cost, and they won't provide any other access. And so I think I'm just gonna yeah, use this and kind of be like, Stop putting it on us. We're happy to be there and fight for it, but it's also not just the Independents that have to do it.

**Caroline Bowditch** 44:08

Thank you. Thanks, Georgia. That's such a good point. Yeah, other thoughts before we respond Hi,

**Elena** 44:31

Hello, everyone. My name is Elena . Me from my experience as an artist and growing up I'm a profoundly Deaf person ear myself. So for me, sorry. For me being the biggest change for me would be to be more confident in asking for the not...

**Caroline Bowditch** 44:56

Can we just have some of my contention sorry, I don't want to interrupt you but there is a fairly horrendous sound happening outside

**Unknown speaker** 45:09

there's another speaker.

**Elena** 45:13

Yeah, being confident in being able to ask for ask, what access we need? Or how, how to make it easier for ourselves and I resonate with both Penny and Grace in going, what exactly do we need to do? So I think it's being more aware, from an artist point of view, in then also helping our own organisations in going how else can we do that? Yeah, so that would be my kind of contribution. Thank you.

**Caroline Bowditch** 45:52

Thank you, that makes me also think about Disability pride. And how do we support each other to build greater Disability pride so that we're not, this is not a point of shame. But this is a part of our identity. And getting what we need is actually, just what we need is a fact.

**Amelia** 46:17

Hello, my name is Amelia. I'm not a performer at all, I work in the museum and gallery sector, at a peak body. And the thing that I've been thinking about, and something that we're working on, and it's with anything to do with First Nations audiences and engagement, but also needs to happen for Disability content, is that when we speak to our funders, so obviously, it's usually someone that Creative Victoria, but also philanthropic funders, is being really, really clear and explicit about building in time for consultation. And I think obviously, not everyone here is at museums and galleries as performers. But when you have a funder saying, "Hey, here's some money, but you're going to have to spend it in this amount of time". And as a creative person you're like, but I think we need to push back to our funders to say, if you don't give us enough time to consult, and to do that slow relationship building, your money's kind of not worth it. And so if you are actually starting to make that argument, it makes it more possible for other people to make that argument to the vendors as well.

**Caroline Bowditch** 47:24

Thank you, says a lot too about employing more Disabled people in the art sector, because you've got a really good place to start.

**Greta** 47:46

Hi, my name is Greta. And the thing that resonated with me the most was the point you made about all of us, a big thing we can do as taking our money elsewhere and letting venues or organisations know this, because I think it's a theme of everyone working in the arts, how there isn't enough money. And it's at multiple stages. And I'm only an emerging creative myself, I only work part time so that I can hopefully put on more plays that I write and I produce, but I really put on one. But I'm now know that the venue I put it on wasn't accessible or nearly as accessible as it could have been. And we were in a position where no one was getting paid as a profit share, we didn't really have anywhere else to go. And so we tried everything later on to fix that and put out as many accessibility measures as we could. But even if it comes to in the future, just doing things like not only more research, but also more patients in that, well, if it means I'm going to put on my play in a year from now, so I can raise more funds. So I can go to a venue that is better, even if it's more affordable, or if I can somehow make a change so that I can do it better. And even that involves sacrifice. I think that's most important, especially because we can all say you know all but I don't have enough money. I can make the exception this one time. But it's that consistency, because we're all in the same boat. And it's not every man, woman person for themselves. And, unfortunately, money is a big part of it and money talks. So thank you very much for saying that that was really resonating with me.

**Caroline Bowditch** 49:34

We need to finish but I wonder if each of the panelists had one thing that you would want to leave with the audience for them to take away. That might be from our conversation. It might be something else. Thanks for coming. Yeah, just one thing that you would want to leave with the audience.

**Liel Bridgford** 50:02

Liel speaking. This probably is obvious, but go and watch Disabled art, consumed Disability led art. I think that's pretty obvious. But if you didn't get it, go and do that. Actually, Carly and I are doing an event on Sunday night, you're welcome to come along. It's called the UnMarginalised season two launch. And it's my podcast, and we're launching a second season where I'm talking to people who navigate intersectionality. And most of them are Disabled people. But that's just one example. Thanks.

**Anniene Stockton** 50:48

Anniene speaking. We can do this. Together, we can make change, and throw to the current Festival, and to the building we're in. It's about fucking time. Let's make it happen.

**Penny Pollard** 51:11

Well, I think we all love Netflix. So we all need to watch Crip Camp, because it's pretty awesome. And one, maybe two more quick things with Deaf access or hard of hearing access to if someone asked to repeat, try and think of a different way to say it. So you're not repeating the same thing over and over and yelling and getting upset and upsetting us just say it differently creatively. And say, in convers... not in in artists talks. And so you're having to do artists talks or presentations, just print it out. So we have a hard copy. So if you can't do live captioning, and you can't use Auslan, at least we have it in written form, is helpful.

**Grace Jarvis** 51:59

I'd say just don't assume that a person isn't Disabled. Because you can't tell from looking at them would be my big thing. Just it's, it's tricky to have an invisible disability and have to like, sort of wheel out your medical history. Every time you mentioned an ache or pain because it's, it's there's a lot of stuff going on with people that's not visible or that they're not talking about. And it's not. It's not super helpful when you act to surprise or like, Oh, you look so young. And so you're, you know, you look like yours, Brian and nonDisabled. And it's, it's kind of disheartening every time. So I would just like change your expectations of what a Disabled person looks like. And also Yeah, go to Disabled. Because it's so good. There's so much because I mean, I'm a comedian, so I'm biased, but there's so much great Disabled comedy and plays and like there's so much art being made by Disabled people. That is so funny and interesting and smart. And yeah, go look at it.

**Carly Findlay** 53:09

Yeah, I should have brought some programs with, but check out Melbourne fringe.com. Today, you 13% of our artists this year in the festival are Deaf and Disabled, which is a huge increase from previous years. So go. There's amazing shows, I think I want to touch on Disability pride and I guess this is throwing allyship within the community within the Disability and Deaf communities and neurodivergent communities is it's really hard sometimes to be a visibly Disabled person because we have no choice but to disclose. And it can be hard for people with invisible disabilities as well because they feel like they can't so for non Disabled allies make it a safe space for everyone to disclose their access needs. I'm not saying you have to talk about your disability when talking about your access needs, you can say I need an Auslan interpreter you don't have to say you're Deaf or I can say I need a blanket I don't necessarily have to go into my medical history, but by making it a safe space for people to disclose. It makes it easier for all of us to speak up and I feel like if you do have an invisible disability and to show allyship it is great to vocalise Disability pride and speak up if you're comfortable and and show that allyship because sometimes it can feel like we as I absolutely don't want to create a hierarchy because that's not helpful. But sometimes we can feel like we're doing all the heavy lifting so that other people can speak but when we all speak together it's more powerful I think.

**Janice Florence** 54:49

Ah for me it would just be for people being aware of assumptions. Graeme Innes, he used to be the Disability Commissioner on the Federal Human Rights Commission said talked about the low, the soft discrimination of low expectations. And I think I've had that thrown at me all the time and makes me really tired. And I've got lots of things to do with my energy. So I don't want to be tired. Yeah, I think just being aware of these assumptions as they come up, I mean, they go way back, you know, to when we were the devil's child or taboo or something. I think just important to not act on those assumptions. Just wait. And listen, listening is really important. Listening and consulting with us.

**Caroline Bowditch** 55:50

Thanks. Thanks so much. So we're going to try something new, because I know you're gonna want to show the love to our panelists, but we're going to try something that we need to be doing more, which is, rather than rapturous applause, I'm going to get you to join me either in clicking or in joining in a Deaf clap to show your love to everybody. Because it will make the room much more comfortable. So thank you so much, everyone on the panel. Thank you so much, everyone for coming. It's been a joy. And enjoy the rest of fringe. And yeah, keep being ace and help us carry the load. Thanks so much.

**Carly Findlay** 56:34

Thank you. Also, if you need support after this, we recommend Lifeline. One Three double one double four, or is that RACV? I don't know. I don't want to [panel and audience laughs]

**Grace Jarvis** 56:52

131114 I'm pretty sure .

**Carly Findlay** 56:56

sorry. Oh, the Arts and Wellbeing Collective.

**Janice Florence** 57:08

That's the number for the Emotional Breakdown Van.

**Carly Findlay** 57:08

Thanks Janice.