

Disability Done Different: Episode 37

Graeme Innes on...



Podcast transcript

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Hosts: Roland Naufal & Evie Naufal
Guest: Graeme Innes

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Intro

DSC is a team of 33 people across Australia, all working together to bring specialised training and consulting expertise to providers in the disability sector.

Evie Naufal

All right, here's what's going to happen now.

Roland Naufal

Hello and welcome to our podcast.

Evie Naufal

We are DSC. Your turn. You're the boss

Evie and Roland

Disability Done Different

Evie Naufal

Candid Conversations. Hope you are ready because we're starting.

Roland Naufal

I'm Roland Naufal. In the studio today, and actually in the studio, Evie, we've got Graeme Innes.

Evie Naufal

Welcome Graeme.

Graeme Innes

Thanks very much. It's great to be here.

Roland Naufal

Graeme Innes is very well known in our sector, so I won't spend a lot of time in the intro because we will talk to you a bit about your background. But lawyer, company director and human rights advocate - is that a reasonable three-part summary?

Graeme Innes

Yes, I think that probably sums it up.

Roland Naufal

Yep. Graeme, we wanted to get a little bit personal with you and ask you your journey to here. Along the way you became a Human Rights Commissioner, but can you tell us a bit about how you come to be a Human Rights Commissioner and, now, in the positions you're in?

Graeme Innes

Okay. It's been a reasonably long journey, so I'm getting towards the end of my career now, but I always wanted to be a lawyer from the time I was in my teens because I thought that that was a way to improve the community in which I lived. It was as broad as that, and so I became a lawyer. It was inevitable I think that I was going to do some sort of advocacy in the disability field. I started that when I was a law student and there were problems getting material in braille.

I advocated around that and then my advocacy career broadened out. Working at the Anti-Discrimination Board in New South Wales started me on discrimination and human rights. You put lawyer, human rights advocate together and my career sort of built from that. I was privileged to be asked by the government to become Human Rights Commissioner in 2005, as well as disability Discrimination Commissioner at the Human Rights Commission. That's the short summary role.

Roland Naufal

Yeah. There's a lot more since then. One of the questions I'd like to ask is - when we're challenged, we've got two options. We can step back or we step forward. Where did you get the urge to step forward and do something about the challenges that you face?

Graeme Innes

I was always encouraged by my parents to step forward. My parents always encouraged us as children to assert our position, and I was always supported in that. That probably is where it started. I've always had a strong commitment to fairness and justice and so I built that stepping forward to do for other people as well as for myself, I suppose.

Roland Naufal

I'm a child of a similar vintage to you and you were one of the first children with disabilities integrated in year 11 and 12 into a mainstream Sydney high school, and that could not have been easy.

Graeme Innes

It wasn't easy. It was a big challenge to move from a special school, which was built and designed for people who are blind or vision-impaired and had about a hundred kids there, to a school of more than a thousand boys in an area which was messy with old and new buildings and the environment wasn't easy. There were kids running around who you'd never even met and it was noisy. It was a challenge. I like challenges I suppose.

Roland Naufal

Nothing would've been done to suit you, would it? Everything would be a retrofit at best.

Graeme Innes

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. I had to learn my way around the environment. I remember one of the challenges I had was that there were these concrete staircases that led up to the second floor of one of the new buildings where I regularly had to go to classes, but there was nothing underneath the staircases, so the way I used to find them normally was with my head-

Roland Naufal

Oh, gosh.

Graeme Innes

I soon learned to be careful around that area, but no, the environment wasn't adjusted at all.

Roland Naufal

I'll keep going for a tad but it's 2023 now, it's a long time later. I was looking around our studio and apartment before you came in and I was seeing a number of spots where you could hurt yourself quite easily. You still must be banging around a bit.

Graeme Innes

Yeah. Look, if you're totally blind, that happens. People get very concerned about me running into things and my position is, well, when I run into it, I'll know where it is. That's sort of true. Of course, I'm careful and I don't charge around unnecessarily.

I also use what's called echolocation these days. I just learned it as a kid, that I can tell where things are, walls or trees or poles, if they're big enough by the echo that bounces off them. I'll often flick my fingers or make a little noise, even walk a little bit more loudly and use the echoes of that to locate things. That's a technique that many blind people use, particularly people who are born blind and so that keeps me a bit more protected, but you're absolutely right. The front of my shins are pretty smashed around after a life of running into things.

Evie Naufal

I want to ask about your corporate career, Graeme, because you've worked at Qantas and Westpac, and I'm wondering from your perspective, whether those big organisations can be leaders in the disability space or whether they really need to follow?

Graeme Innes

Oh no, they absolutely can be leaders if the leadership in those organisations choose for them to be. At the time, two people, Ann Sherry at Westpac and another person at Qantas who were in middle-to-senior management positions, chose for their organisations to play more of a leadership role when I was asked to come on board to work with them, to improve their position in the disability field, both in terms of employment and service provision. Private organisations can definitely lead if they choose to.

Evie Naufal

I'd be curious to actually see what the comparison is. Whether organisations in the disability sector really are leaders in terms of disability employment, and disability access. I don't actually have a sense of intuition about it. It's entirely possible there's larger organisations which are held to more external standards may?

Graeme Innes

I think some are. I think a number of organisations play that role. I like to think that Life Without Barriers, to name one, only because I'm on the Board of it, plays that role. I think that Northcott plays that role. I think there's a number of other big disability service providers who do try to lead in that area.

One of the areas where I think we fall down is that disability service provision organisations should be far better at employing people with disabilities than they are. It's often the first question I ask senior people in such organisations, so what's the percentage of people with disabilities that you employ?

Because we can't advocate for it if we don't do it ourselves, I don't think. So that's a key measure for me about the effectiveness of an organisation.

Roland Naufal

Given that, it must be frustrating at times when you're invited into disability organisations and it's totally inaccessible still.

Graeme Innes

Yeah. I mean, the environment can be a challenge, but the culture is really the big thing. I believe if you change culture and you change attitudes, then lots of the other changes that we need as people with disabilities just flow from that.

I remember when I first started with Life Without Barriers, that I would move around the country attending particular Board meetings or other meetings, and as soon as I walked into an office, the assumption was that I was there as a client, even though I walked in-

Roland Naufal

Wow.

Graeme Innes

... dressed in a jacket, usually a tie, which I'm not wearing today because I believe they're pre-pandemic, and people would think I was a client. I talked to the CEO and the Board about that and I said, "LWB has a great culture of caring and supporting people with disabilities. What we are not good at is empowering and that's what we have to change."

Roland Naufal

I want to take it further too, you were also involved in the Attitude Foundation. You're still involved?

Graeme Innes

I'm on the Board now. I'm no longer chair. My time on the Board will finish at the end of this year.

Roland Naufal

They're aimed using media to change attitudes towards people with disability.

Graeme Innes

Yeah.

Roland Naufal

What's the story there? How does that work?

Graeme Innes

Well, a bunch of us got together when I finished my time at the Human Rights Commission, I spoke at The Press Club as one of the last events whilst I was Disability Discrimination Commissioner. I talked about attitudes towards people with disabilities and how I thought that was the biggest barrier in Australia. That resonated in the media in Australia more than I thought it would.

So a bunch of us grabbed that opportunity to set up an organisation called the Attitude Foundation, which was focused on using media and social media to change attitudes towards people with disabilities. We support people with disabilities to tell our own stories. We support people with

disabilities to be behind the microphone or the camera as well as in front of it and to share their experience as a way of changing attitudes.

Because people with disabilities generally don't want to be regarded as... We're presented... The two tropes in the media are heroes or victims. We're amazing, inspiring heroes, if we're Paralympians or we've done something else outstanding, or we're victims of a terrible accident or injury. That's the two ways that we are presented.

Really, I think we need to be presented as agents of our own destiny, just getting on with living our lives. So we try to have people with disabilities tell our own stories of doing just that.

Roland Naufal

We are starting to see a bit of change in that space, aren't we? People behind the mics.

Graeme Innes

I think we are. I think we are starting to see a bit of change. Roland, I'm an advocate, so it's never as fast as I'd like it to be. But I talk about one of the tensions of advocacy being the fact that the change never goes fast enough. If it does, then you are you're too relaxed and comfortable. Yes, I think we are starting to see a bit of change now.

Evie Naufal

Yeah. I have to admit, Graeme, I don't know exactly what the Human Rights Commissioner does. Could you explain it?

Graeme Innes

Well, so I was the Disability Discrimination Commissioner. Well, no, let me start from a different place. The Human Rights Commission has about five or six different commissioners and they're responsible for different things. Sex discrimination, disability discrimination, age discrimination. There's a Children's Commissioner, Race Discrimination Commissioner, and I've probably forgotten a couple.

The role of the Disability Discrimination Commissioner is to work with government and large private organisations to try and change policy in the area of disability to remove discrimination. You also have a bit of a role in looking at the trends that come from discrimination complaints lodged with the Human Rights Commission, and using those trends to guide your work as the Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

It's basically a policy position where you work with government and sometimes in opposition to government trying to push policy agendas which relate to people with disabilities.

Evie Naufal

Is it a rewarding position or frustrating?

Graeme Innes

It's a bit of both. I found it very rewarding. While I was there, we managed to get a few things done. When I say we, there was a team of great people that I worked with, I don't claim all of the results that we achieved, but transport standards were enacted. Building standards were enacted. All of these are regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act, which if like you mean that individuals don't have to complain about a bus or a train if it's not accessible.

You don't have to prove discrimination. You only have to prove that the organisation involved is not complying with these standards. There are sets of regulations and it just makes the process easier

and tends to be a systemic way to address the challenges facing people with disabilities rather than having to do it by the drip technique of one complaint after another.

Roland Naufal

You're jogging my memory. A moment ago, you spoke about speaking at The Press Club. Wasn't that a controversial time when we felt like the roles of the commission were being downgraded?

Graeme Innes

Yes. It was a significantly controversial time. The government had just changed. The Abbott government was elected. They downgraded a whole range of government areas. When my term was completed and I discovered that my term was going to be completed on page 567 of the federal budget, there wasn't another Disability Discrimination Commissioner appointed for some time. At the time, some political appointments started to be made.

Roland Naufal

Yep.

Evie Naufal

I have a question. The rights enshrined in law are obviously a really important part of progress, but I want to ask you specifically about attitudes.

I'm remembering some research that I can't remember the exact details of now, but I'll butcher for the sake of explaining it, was saying that if the pace of change continued exactly as it is, then we would reach a point where the majority of Americans have neutral views towards LGBTQIA+ people in about 10 years, for the Black community, those kinds of attitudes would change or become neutral in about 50 years, and when we look at age-based attitudes, it's like a hundred years.

They were making comparisons about the speed of change in attitudes for each of those marginalized groups. I want to ask you because you've been working in this space for so long, do you have a sense that the pace of change is accelerating in people's attitudes towards people with disability?

Graeme Innes

Well, that's a really interesting piece of research. I'd love to know more about that. I haven't heard of that sort of comparative assessment, but it goes a lot to what I talk about when I make speeches and presentations. René Cassin, the French jurist, said that it's not laws that have to change, it's attitudes that have to change, and I've now butchered his quote to go with your research.

There are changes in attitude. I'm seeing green shoots, I suppose, but it's still very, very slow. I think about my own experience as a person with a disability in the last couple of days. I've had a number of situations relatively minor that I've dealt with, but day to day... Well, Elizabeth Hastings, the first Disability Discrimination Commissioner used to say, we swim in a sea of discrimination and that's really true.

I've had a number of situations where assumptions have been made about me, which are very limiting and negative assumptions, which are mostly wrong. As a result of that, a person has acted assuming that I won't be able to do a whole lot of things or that I won't be able to use an escalator traveling with my guide dog, I'll need a lift or that I won't know where something is or I won't... Yeah.

A whole lot of little assumptions that get made, which just reinforce that negative attitude towards people with disabilities. Look, there is a bit of change, Evie, and I'm an optimist so I always talk it up and encourage it, but I think we've got a long way to go.

Roland Naufal

Can we drill down a bit into the concept of discrimination? You talked about the race discrimination and gender discrimination, disability discrimination. We've talked about a bunch. What do they have in common? What does discrimination actually mean? What's happening when people are discriminated against that they've got in common? If that's not a tricky question.

Graeme Innes

In broad terms, discrimination is less favorable treatment on the basis of the particular thing that the person has, whether it's race, disability, gender, whatever. That's discrimination. I think there are a lot of commonalities between different disempowered groups. I refer to them as disempowered groups. I think people with disabilities and people from culturally and linguistically-diverse backgrounds can learn from women and the women's movement and what women have achieved.

I'm not suggesting that women have yet reached equality. They certainly haven't, but they're further along the road than those other groups that I talk about. There are differences of course, but I think there's a lot of commonalities and I often rely on those too, as part of the lessons that I pick up to try and speed up the process for people with disabilities.

Roland Naufal

One of the things I've tried to understand is why do people discriminate against these different groups and is there a commonality there? Does that concept of other, is it as simple and as complex as being other?

Graeme Innes

Yeah. I think it's othering basically, Roland. We tend to gravitate towards people who are the same as us. That's a natural sort of human tendency, in the main. I'm talking here generalities. I'm sure there are exceptions. Anyone who's different, we tend to dismiss or minimize or want to overpower. Then of course, combined with that is the whole position of privilege.

White men are the privileged people in society and for someone to get closer to equality, then someone's privilege has to be a little reduced and so the people who have that privilege are going to tend to react, to try and prevent that happening. Now, then we get to making conscious decisions and some of us, hopefully more and more of us in that group, are recognizing that the whole society will benefit from greater equality and so we are more prepared to give up that privilege.

I think it's about othering and I think it's about privilege. I think they're the two things that drive discrimination if you're going back into that philosophical discussion of it.

Roland Naufal

Yes.

Evie Naufal

I want to have a chat about how Australia compares to some other countries in terms of the laws and public policies that we've got that address the rights of people with disability. Where do you think we sit on a world stage?

Graeme Innes

We're doing quite well, I think. We're probably in the top 10 or 15 countries. Some people in Australia would be a bit surprised to hear me say that, but we're I think the fourth biggest economy in the world, so we damn well should be in the top 10 to 15 countries. In fact, we should be in the top four to five countries and we're not.

It's hard to make that comparison because in different areas we're better or worse than other countries. But we're up there with the group of the U.S., Europe, the UK, the Nordic countries. We're up in that group, but we should be too because economically that's where we are.

Roland Naufal

Graeme, we've spent more than 20 minutes talking to you already and what haven't we talked about?

Graeme Innes

Well, we haven't talked about the NDIS, which is what I thought we were going to talk about.

Evie Naufal

Imagine that, a conversation without-

Roland Naufal

Imagine that.

Graeme Innes

It's been a fascinating conversation, nonetheless.

Roland Naufal

Yeah. Let's segue to that. We're approaching a hundred days since the change of government, just approaching it. What are your reflections on the first period that this government has come in to run the NDIS again?

Graeme Innes

A couple of reflections, firstly, I think the right positive noises are being made and there are clear intentions to address the problems in the NDIS. Yeah, the NDIS is like a big cruise ship or container ship. It's a big scheme. There are more than 500,000 people now supported by the NDIS, it's going to take time to turn it around. So I'm seeing good signs, but I don't know yet that we're seeing that many positive results.

I mean, just in the last week, we've seen the fact that there are still... I think it's 1300, but I might have that number wrong, people with disabilities are still in hospitals waiting for NDIS placements. I've seen quite a bit of media about that in the last week, both here in Victoria and in South Australia. That's good because I haven't seen much media about it beforehand.

That, to me, is a good sign, but I'm not seeing too many people yet getting out of those hospitals and moving into appropriate accommodation. I think the pandemic is a driver here, and we should take advantage of that. There's a window of opportunity. Hospital beds need to be cleared. There's big incentives for governments, state and federal governments to get on with it, and so the NDIS is being seen as a block.

Well, good, because we might get that block removed. I'm having conversations about the numbers of reviews and appeals in the scheme and how those numbers need to be reduced. We're not seeing

those numbers reduced yet, but we're seeing signs of significant activity in that area, so that's a good thing. I'm seeing recognition by government that the measure of sustainability of the scheme used by the previous government is the wrong measure.

So when you weigh sustainability of any activity, of course you have to weigh the cost in one side of the scales. But in the other side of the scales, you have to put things like improvement in the quality of lives of people with disability, increased employment for people with and without disability, as a result of the scheme.

The fact that for every dollar spent in the scheme per capita, research indicates that \$2.25 go back into the economy as compared to Defence, where for every dollar spent, only 90 cents goes back into our economy. You have to put those things in the other dish of the scale in order to measure sustainability. I think this government is now using the right measure for sustainability. That's a positive sign for me as well.

Roland Naufal

You used the metaphor, I think that's the right word for, as a big ship that's quite hard to turn around. One of the best metaphors in governance I've heard about is it's a big ship and the job of the leadership, particularly the Board and then you're an experienced company director, is stewardship. Deciding which direction strategically the ship should be going. Can you take us up to the stewardship of the ship and what direction you think it should be going?

Graeme Innes

Well, stewardship is of course critical and stewardship of the NDIS relates to the board of the NDIS, but it also relates very clearly to government. There was a very interesting article in your newsletter that I read just last week, about the responsibilities of the new CEO of the NDIS and how he, or she, will report to about four or five different masters.

That's very true of a government scheme like this, where there's a board, but it's not like an independent company where the board is running it. There's a whole lot of masters involved. Yeah, stewardship of the scheme is very important. I'm not on the NDIS board so I don't know internally what's happening there, but I would imagine that with the pressure from government, Bill Shorten, as the manager is a person who wants to get on and make change.

He will be working very closely with the board, encouraging them to drive that change, to change the direction of the scheme. I mean, you can't have a scheme where plans on average drop by 4% in one financial year and say that the scheme is working. I mean, that just can't be right. That's where I talk about the measure of sustainability, where all the weight on the scales was put in the one dish of we've got to spend less money.

That can't be the way to run a scheme the aim of which is to improve the quality of lives of people with disabilities and our families as a result of that, and in doing so, building, strengthening the Australian economy. Yeah. There's got to be different ways to approach it and I'm hopeful that the board and the leadership, the new CEO, when they come on board will be taking those.

Evie Naufal

Part of that shift that's required is going to be a shift in culture both internally and externally. Internally, the agency needs to change to be more collaborative and transparent. That could not be clear of what we've heard from what people want from the agency. Externally, the NDIS needs to change away from being the oasis in the desert (the one place that people with disability, or one of the very, very few places that people with disability can get support in Australia). How does that happen?

Graeme Innes

Well, I think one of the key things towards that happening is that we have more leadership of people with disabilities. I think 19% of the employees of the NDIS are people with disabilities, but if you took the top two or three levels of leadership, I think you would find that percentage would drop very significantly. We need to change that so that we have people with lived experience of disability.

I think lived experience of disability has to become one of the criteria for finding leadership of the scheme. It just hasn't been in the past, and we wouldn't have a huge agency supporting women without women running it at the top. We don't have large agencies supporting the First Australians, Aboriginal people, which don't have strength of Aboriginal leadership. Why is it any different for people with disabilities?

Evie Naufal

I just want to jump in there, Graeme, because you're absolutely right. We actually recently did a Freedom of Information about the number of people with disability employed in the Agency, and that dynamic that you just described with fairly high levels, the more junior roles and much lower percentage of people with disability at more senior roles is exactly what plays out. Why is that the case?

Graeme Innes

Because of what I spoke about earlier, the negative and limiting assumptions about people with disabilities, that means that we are not nearly as often successful in leadership roles. I mean, I'm writing a presentation that I'm going to give next week. If you take the various areas of Australia, you can count on one or two hands, key people with disabilities who are in leadership positions, in those roles.

Whether it's the public service, state or federal government, I can count on one hand, I reckon, senior bureaucrats in the federal and state government who I know are people who identify as people with disabilities. When you look at politicians, I can only think of one or two in state and federal parliaments who are people with disabilities. When you look at people with high profile in media, sure, we have the Australian of the Year, Dylan, he's a legend. We have myself, perhaps, we have Kurt Fearnley.

We have a couple of other people who've made it to the top, but the representation of people with disabilities is low, and that of course has an impact on where the scheme, the NDIS picks its leaders, because there haven't been people given that experience. Now, again, we are seeing green shoots here. The government has just funded 85 people to do Australian Institute of Company Directors courses so that we can get more people with disabilities on boards, but that's going to take a while to filter through.

I think the scheme and the minister have to be braver about choosing scheme leaders. We probably have to choose a few more people who are perhaps less proven to take up those roles, because there's been a huge historical lack of opportunities for people with disabilities to become leaders. I think that's part of the problem. I think the scheme has to be far more transparent, as you've said, Evie. I think that's been part of the problem.

And the independent assessments process just really damaged trust in the scheme. It takes so long to build back trust. That trust was really damaged in six or 12 months, it's going to take years to build that trust back. That makes me so sad because there were such high hopes for the scheme seven/eight years ago when it was first started.

Roland Naufal

Graeme, I wanted to ask you to reflect on the oasis in the desert. Evie just raised it. That concept that the NDIS is the only thing for people with disabilities, and that has become the public narrative. It has become the wider understanding. If you've got a disability, it's the NDIS and there is nothing else. Now, you've got humongous experience right back to transport discrimination, the Attitude Foundation, working in the media, working as A Human Rights Commissioner, and so much of that is about trying to shift public discourse.

We've begun again, we're talking about Tier 2 again, or I think most people don't understand what Tier 2 is. Bruce Bonyhady coined "the oasis in the desert". I noticed Bill Shorted took it on to call it "the only lifeboat in the sea", but in your experience, how do we keep the public discourse where it needs to be so we're talking about the stuff that's important?

Graeme Innes

Well, the scheme is the only oasis in the desert, lifeboat in the sea, choose any analogy that you will. There's another one that I've been using, but I've just forgotten it now because I think those ones are better. A couple of things, firstly, the NDIS, and the issues around the NDIS have sucked most of the energy on disability out of the community in the last five to 10 years.

That was always going to happen. We knew when the scheme was designed that that was going to happen. I would've hoped that it would've come back by now. I think if the scheme had been run more successfully, it might have started. What we've got is only 10% of people with disabilities are supported by the NDIS. The other 90% are supported by other services in community. Those services are lacking.

State governments agreed to hand over their responsibility in order to create the NDIS, their disability responsibility. What's happened in a lot of ministers' and senior bureaucrats' offices in state governments is that they've said, "Yippee, we're done on disability now. End of story. We can focus our energy somewhere else." We have to turn that around. We have to have the minister for transport and roads in New South Wales recognize that they have a responsibility for people with disabilities.

We have to have the fisheries minister realize that they have a responsibility for people with disabilities. We have to have local government pick up its responsibility for people with disabilities. That's impacted on by the negative and limiting attitudes towards people with disabilities and all the assumptions that I've talked about earlier in this podcast. That's a key issue as well.

I also think we have to get the conversation around the NDIS in context, and the three of us are sitting here talking about all the problems in the NDIS, and I should have started here when we started talking about the NDIS. There are hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities in Australia who are far, far better off because of the NDIS.

We have to be really careful that the public conversation doesn't move so far against the NDIS that people start saying... And I heard this being said under the previous government, "Then maybe we just go back to the old system. Maybe this scheme hasn't worked, it's been a failed project. We just go back to the old system." The NDIS is a far, far better thing than what we had before.

I think there are something like 200 or 250,000 people with disabilities now receiving support from the NDIS who didn't receive any disability support before the scheme started. It's really important to keep the conversation in context. I'm not saying the NDIS is perfect. It's clearly not, but it's a hugely better solution than what we had beforehand.

Evie Naufal

Yeah. Spot on. The new government has called for a review of the NDIS though, which I just have to ask, it seems like the issues with the NDIS are so well-documented and agreed upon, and even to some extent some of the solutions are agreed upon. Do we need another review?

Graeme Innes

I don't think we need a review. I think we need actions. I'm not persuaded that there's a review needed, and if there's a review needed, then it can be just done by some people sitting in an office or a room gathering all the previous reviews and working out what are the best recommendations and getting on with doing them. Governments are very good at reviews.

We've had a lot of Royal Commissions in Australia in a whole range of areas in the last 10 years. The cynic in me that's developed in my time in government and other roles during my career says, "Well, that's a good way to put off action for the next couple of years while we have a commission." We know most of the problems. We just need to get on with implementing the solutions.

Roland Naufal

My entry into the NDIS, Graeme, was I did the community engagement strategy back in 2012. The government spent close to a million dollars funding a bunch of disability organisations around Australia to ask people what the NDIS should look like when it was pre being built. We did an enormous set of consultations, spoke to a huge number of people, wrote a really comprehensive report, and I'm pretty convinced no one read it.

Graeme Innes

Yeah. Well, there's a lot of reports like that one, Roland, and you do have to... I mean, the reality about reports... and I've learned it because I've been involved in writing many of those reports, is that 90% of the people read the executive summary. We spend so much time developing reports, doing consultation and developing reports.

Roland Naufal

It's true.

Evie Naufal

It's been so great to talk to you, Graeme. I'm sure our listeners might be wondering, "This guy seems pretty practiced behind the mic." Just before we started, you were telling us about your radio show. Can you tell our listeners about the show before we head off?

Graeme Innes

Oh, wow. I'd love to. Well, firstly, can I say, I've done a bit of media over the years. So that helps, and so I've learned a lot of lessons from that. I'm also married to a journalist and she trained me on working with the media. I was probably the commissioner that caused the most difficulty for the public affairs team at the Human Rights Commission, because I actually went out looking for media.

I used to give journalists my direct phone number and say, "Just call me on this." Because I really believe that media is the way to elevate the importance in the community of disability issues, and so you have to work with them. Journalists aren't the enemy. They're just doing the job of a journalist and so I tend to work with them.

To relax, I enjoy music, and this will show my age, from the '50s, '60s, '70s, and '80s. I make a weekly program on a station called Mushroom FM, which of course is the home of the fun guys. It's called Deep Dive and it focuses on one artist for one hour. I've been doing it for a couple of years now. I love

doing it. I'm not sure how I find the time to do it, but I keep finding it, so I must be enjoying. I produce a radio program each week.

Roland Naufal

Graeme, I would like to do a thank you. You spoke at our Where To From Here Conference, WTFH, this year, and you had the job at the end of the conference of pulling all the threads together. We did a really big picture conference about the future of the NDIS. You did a sensational job and a number of people have come back and said that was a highlight of the conference for them.

Graeme Innes

Oh, well, that's very generous. I only had that job because you gave it to me, Roland.

Roland Naufal

Well, you only got it because I checked out with a number of people who'd be good to do it. Yeah.

Graeme Innes

Yeah. It's important to listen at a conference like that and to gather the thoughts of what people have said and I just felt like you and I reflected those thoughts in the chat we had at the end. It was a pleasure to do. It was one of the few times where I haven't had to write my own material because someone else did it all at the conference. Yeah.

Evie Naufal

Thanks so much, Graeme.

Graeme Innes

Great to talk with you, both.

Roland Naufal

It's been a pleasure.

[outro music]

Roland Naufal

Evie, that was great. We should do that more often.

Evie Naufal

What?

Roland Naufal

Podcasts.

Evie Naufal

Just in general?

Roland Naufal

Yeah. Yeah. They're fun. Great people. Great conversations.

Evie Naufal

Maybe we start a podcast.

Roland Naufal

Yeah.

Evie Naufal

Well, we started one. We've got to continue it, I think is your point.

Roland Naufal

Yeah. You just saw Graeme off downstairs and what happened?

Evie Naufal

The Uber driver kept driving once he saw the guide dog.

Roland Naufal

Ah, and what are you doing about it?

Evie Naufal

I'm complaining.

Roland Naufal

Yeah. That's a pretty shitty thing, isn't it? At the end of the -

Evie Naufal

But Graeme did say that Uber takes it pretty seriously.

Roland Naufal

Oh, so the complaint should be heard.

Evie Naufal

Yeah.

Roland Naufal

Cool. So the outro...

Evie Naufal

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Roland Naufal

Cheers.