



Access Captions

when accuracy matters

Bernadette McGoldrick

Stenocaptioner, RPR, CRC

0405 350 799

bernadette@accesscaptions.com.au

accesscaptions.com.au

Live Transcript

Essential Media

The Disability Dialogue

What makes an inclusive community?

Spaces, supports and everything in between

Wednesday 12 August 2026

1:00pm to 2:25pm AEST

This transcript was produced live by a stenocaptioner and may contain errors or omissions.

SKYE CUSACK: Hi, everyone. We're just waiting for everyone to come in. Just give it a second. I hope everyone is doing well. OK! Let's go. Hello, everyone. My name is Skye Cusack and I will be co-hosting today's Open Dialogue about what makes communities truly inclusive. I have shoulder-length brown and orange hair, and I'm a light-skinned Aboriginal person, and I'm wearing a grey shirt.

First, I want to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we gather. I am joining you from the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people. I also want to pay respect to all Elders and ancestors, and any First Nations people here today. It always was, always will be, Aboriginal land. And if you feel comfortable, you can share the lands that you're joining from today in the chat. That's always my favourite part of meetings like this.

A little more about me. So, my name is Skye. I am a First Nations person. I am Dulguburra-Yidinji. And I am a writer and a journalist and I identify as having physical, mental, and intellectual disabilities, and I'm excited to be here with everyone today. Over to you, Todd.

TODD WINTHER: Hi, everyone. My name is Todd Winther. I'm also one of the hosts for today's event. I am in a motorised wheelchair, in my early 40s, with slowly greying, short hair. I am the Subject Matter Specialist in Home and Living at Disability Services Consulting, DSC. Just in case everyone is wondering, we do visual descriptions of ourselves so people who are blind or have low vision know who is speaking and what they look like. It's part of making meetings accessible for everyone as much as possible.

Today's event has live captioning and Auslan available. Please feel free to turn on multi-pin to ensure you can always see an Auslan interpreter, even when we share our screen today.

For those of you who have never been to one of our events before, welcome. The Disability Dialogue is a collaboration between the Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Inclusion Australia, Ability First Australia, and the Melbourne Disability Institute. It's funded through the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building – ILC - grant from the Department of Health, Disability, and Ageing.

SKYE CUSACK: Now we do have just a little bit of housekeeping to make sure everyone has an idea of how today will go. We really want to create a safe, open and inclusive space for everyone. Firstly, AI tools are not allowed. We know that they can be a useful tool for people with disability, but we also want to protect everyone's privacy. We will be uploading a transcript to the event page shortly after this event is over, and we'll also send the recording to all of you via email. Secondly, we try really hard to stick to time to make sure we hear from

all of our guests and have time to hear from you, our audience members. This means that Todd and I might have to interrupt and move things along sometimes - and we're not being rude, we promise, we're just trying to keep everyone on time. We also encourage you to have your camera on, if you're comfortable with that, so we can feel like we're sort of in the room together, but it's completely up to you. We would love to see your comments or questions in the chat, and we may not have time to answer every question but we will do our best to try our best.

TODD WINTHER: If anything in today's discussion brings up any difficult feelings and you would like support, you can visit www.disabilitydialogue.com.au/support. You can find a list of resources available. We will also put this link in the chat. You can take a break from the event at any time. Today's event is being recorded and will be uploaded to The Disability Dialogue website. It will be sent to the Federal Government as a submission from The Disability Dialogue to the Government's consultation on Inclusive Communities. And we'll tell you more about that shortly. Please know we will not be sharing any of your personal information as part of our submission. For this reason, if we read out your question, we won't include your name. With that being said, please be aware when you are sharing things that other people in the public may be able to see you or hear you by watching the recording. That's it for housekeeping. Let's get into it.

Let's talk about the Inclusive Communities Fund. It's a new idea from the Federal Government. The Inclusive Communities Fund will give money to community groups, like sporting clubs and art groups, to help local groups be more inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities.

SKYE CUSACK: That's right. The Australian Government has \$200 million set aside to help support communities to be more inclusive. It's specifically for local groups, like sports, art groups, community centres and libraries, so they can be more accessible and people with disability can genuinely participate and feel part of their communities.

The Australian Government has also invited some organisations to make submissions and share their ideas about how this fund can be used, including The Disability Dialogue. So, as we mentioned before, we are going to upload this video to our YouTube channel and include this video recording as part of our submission, so the Government can hear directly from people with lived experience about how we think that money could and should be used. So, throughout the event, we'll be asking you about what you think an inclusive community means and what they could look like.

TODD WINTHER: Yes, we definitely want to hear your ideas throughout the event, so

please put them in the chat. We are also encouraging everyone to make their own submissions because we know how important it is for the Australian Government to hear directly from people with lived experience. After all, we are the experts. You might have seen a survey we sent to you when you registered for the event to get your ideas for what makes a community inclusive. No worries at all if you didn't get a chance to get to it. We'll go through some of the responses now.

Our first question was, "What do you think makes a community truly inclusive?" A response said, "Everyone feels safe to be themselves, they feel that they belong, their access needs are met in a way that they are able to fully participate and engage in their community. Diversity is celebrated, everyone is welcomed wholly, and that there are diverse representations and visibility." We also heard, "Including accessibility features from the beginning of the planning process rather than adding them on as an afterthought." And, "Having many opportunities to connect with others and feel you belong."

SKYE CUSACK: We also asked, "Do you feel included in your local community?" 46.2% of people who took the survey said 'yes'. 38.5% said sometimes. And 15.4% said no. When asked to tell us more, someone said, "I have met people through walking, swimming, church and work. These are all places I feel I belong and many welcomed." And, "I like that my local area has good pavements and traffic lights at intersections, but I'm disappointed that not all public facilities are accessible by public transport."

TODD WINTHER: We asked people, "Think about your local community. What are some of the places that you wish were more inclusive?" Someone said, "The beach, some toilets, accommodation." Someone else said, "The supermarket, public transport, and cafes." Somebody also wished that there were more working elevators and ramps in public spaces - I definitely feel that one - and more air purifiers that automatically work in rooms. And another place people wished was more inclusive was, "Education and workplaces. Both need to be more flexible. Both need to provide safe environments that promote diversity, access, and inclusion. If you don't have safety, you don't feel like you belong."

SKYE CUSACK: Last but not least, we asked you to think about the Australian Government's new Inclusive Communities Fund and we asked, "What ideas do you have about how local communities could be more inclusive?" Someone said, "I think local communities and community organisations should ask what inclusion looks like to those who are excluded from their community or not engaging with their organisation. Be curious. Be non-judgemental. Be kind." And, "Disabled-led initiatives, actual structural change, not just tokenism, both individual and collective action, and learning to challenge internalised

ableism and dismissive narratives about who gets to be in spaces and how participation can look."

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey. These surveys are also an important way to share your ideas, so we really appreciate when you take the time to fill these out.

TODD WINTHER: I'd like to introduce our first speaker now, Kirsty Nowlan. Kirsty is the Executive Director of The Achieve Foundation. Kirsty has stepped in last-minute for her colleague Marlene at the last moment because, unfortunately, Marlene was having some tech issues today. Kirsty, we are so grateful to have you here at the very last minute. Can you please say hello and give a visual description of yourself?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Hello, everyone. Yes, I'm Kirsty and I'm the Executive Director of The Achieve Foundation. We're running a program about changing attitudes to disability. I am a white woman with curly hair, the hair is blonde with pink strips and so, of course, it's entirely natural! This is my natural hair colour! And I'm in my home office, so you can see a picture of a much younger version of my daughter, behind you. I'm joining you today from the glorious Wallamattagal lands of the Dharug Nation, and I pay my respects to Elders, past, present and emerging, and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues here with us today.

TODD WINTHER: Thanks, Kirsty. Now let's get started. With The Achieve Foundation, you do research in the disability space. What have you learned about inclusive communities?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: So, the work that we're doing is all about breaking down the barriers to the inclusion of people with disability in Australia. So, we're really interested in what happens in people's heads, the attitudes and mindsets that they have to disability, and how they act as barriers to making Australia a more inclusive space. So, our focus is on attitudes because attitudes underpin everything. So, how you think about something changes the way that you feel and act, and also then the decisions that you make. So, if people don't understand the diversity of disabilities or don't understand the impact of exclusion, or even what those barriers are, then that prevents us building a more inclusive society.

So, at the heart of exclusion of people with disability is a set of assumptions about who people with disabilities are, and many of those assumptions are really limiting. So, these are assumed patterns, the way we think the world works, which is based on old, historical ideas that are really flawed about disability, and these attitudes and mindsets drive exclusion.

So, what we want to do is think about how we can change those, and we do those,

acknowledging that people with disability do this every day. We're bringing a set of tools called Reframing - which is about changing the way that we speak about disability.

TODD WINTHER: So, you talked about some of the historical barriers that people with disabilities face. What are some of the other biggest barriers for inclusive communities?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Yeah. Well, the mindsets are then baked into decisions we make, and they can be seen in ways that we design transport systems and spaces that aren't accessible, and when events are created and there's no way for people with disability to get in or to participate in, kind of, events. When classroom teachers teach only one way, assuming that everybody has the same kind of brain. When jobs are designed in ways that exclude people with disability. Or, frankly, when people with disability just don't feel welcome. These aren't oversights and they're not "nice to haves". Removing these barriers is not a nice thing to do, inclusion is not an optional extra. We have to intentionally design inclusion from the beginning.

TODD WINTHER: So, what examples do we have of being included? We've also put this question in the chat because we want to know what examples you, our audience members, have seen too. But what are the significant examples that you've seen, Kirsty?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Yeah, we did a lot of consultation with leaders in the disability movement, and so I'm gonna go quite big-picture now and then give some specific examples. But firstly to say that an inclusive society values difference. So, it assumes that we don't all have to be the same in order to have a good community. It values dignity and equality by recognising that humans are a diverse group of people and when we enable all people with their own abilities to live significant and meaningful lives, to participate and contribute, then we all become stronger.

So, in practice, what this means is that people with disability are included in all aspects of community life and with the same opportunities of other people. This has to be a right and not a privilege. That there are no attitudinal instructional barriers for people with disability. So, no places without kerb ramps, no places without touchscreens, no places that people with disability don't feel welcomed. That we recognise the diversity and contribution to the community of people with disability, and that they are seen and heard in our public places. This means that facilities and community interactions are set up from the get-go to include the diversity of human experience and people with disability. That people with disability are empowered as decision-makers and are leaders in the community, and are recognised for their leadership in the community. And that they're recognised for their

fundamental role in social and economic life, and that has to start from early childhood and go right the way through those stages of life. So...

TODD WINTHER: Sorry, Kirsty. Go ahead.

KIRSTY NOWLAN: We know that the current mindsets are blocking this, and so we really think it's important, as we look at what's happening with the Inclusive Communities Fund, to really embed and include attitude to change within local efforts to support inclusion. But we also need changes in behaviour. We need people to do things differently. So, we're working on creating a bridge between where we are now and where we want to get to, and we're going to have tools that can be used. So, we'll have more to say about this later this year, but what we really want to note - that whether we're talking about a sporting club, an arts festival, or workplaces - when we speak and see things differently, we do things differently, and that's why we need to change attitudes.

TODD WINTHER: Thanks for that, Kirsty. I'm going to go to a question in the chat now for you. "How will the Inclusive Communities Fund help people with intellectual disabilities to access self-advocacy services? Many people with intellectual disabilities need access to self-advocacy services and there are currently not a lot around in NSW, with most being available in Victoria."

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Yeah, that's such a good question. The participation of people with intellectual disability in public life in Australia is something that requires a lot more attention. So, to the person who asked the question, I would really encourage you to add your voice to a submission, to tell the Government that you want precisely those kind of things included so that we can make the fund the most impactful that it can be.

SKYE CUSACK: I'm gonna jump in, if that's OK. I'm getting jealous that you guys are having all the fun! So, Kirsty, someone in the chat said, "I can't believe we are still discussing attitudes and barriers. 32 years on supporting my adult son with ID and physical disabilities, we are still trying to overcome barriers." And I think that that's so true, Kirsty. So, I was wondering, from your perspective, why do you think it's taking so long to change people's attitudes and remove barriers for people with disability to be included?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Yeah, it's a really interesting and important question. I think there's a couple of answers to it - that we have assumed that technical solutions are going to get us where we need to go. So, we run a diversity program in school. We discover that ADHD is a

thing and we start suggesting that teachers teach differently. We have a campaign to shut down segregated schooling, and we hope that people are going to get the message that something needs to change. The problem is that we're trying to do so many things at once, and underpinning those things are a core set of attitudes and assumptions.

So, we know that when we bring people together, with and without disability, for a common purpose, attitudes change. So, we know we can do this. But we haven't been able to get to scale. So, in recent years, we have been starting to think about the role of language in unlocking some of those attitudes and behaviours. So, with the new information we've got about - and new techniques that we've tried in other areas - we've got an opportunity to do it differently now and to do it at scale across the country.

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you.

TODD WINTHER: The chat is really lighting up at the moment. And I want to reflect on a comment from the chat that said the Sunflower lanyard has been incredible, for a commenter, when they were travelling in the UK. They said it made a huge difference for them. One example was when they were whisked through the airport line without having to ask, and this person felt really included. They said they wished it was more recognised in Australia. So that led me to wonder, Kirsty, how do you think we could make the Sunflower lanyard more well-known, and are there other things that we could be doing to make people with disability feel more included, perhaps?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Yeah, I think the Sunflower lanyard is such an interesting example, and the focus on people with hidden disability. I think, as a community, we've got an opportunity to think about how we use social media in order to spread initiatives like the Sunflower lanyard out, so that more people can use it in public spaces.

And I think of the good work that was mentioned previously about the self-advocates, but also there's some movements around disability leadership. So, Christina Ryan does some amazing work with the Disability Leadership Institute, thinking about, "How do we get people with disability in leadership places, like boards and on executives, so that there is a strong argument coming from the top?" That if you are running a business or running an organisation, 20% of your client base - 20%, potentially, of your customers - are people with disability. It is in your interests to include them. So, there's self-interest as well, sharing some great initiatives like the Sunflower lanyard, loud and proud.

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you so much, Kirsty. So, please, everyone, keep your questions coming and we'll try to get to as many as we can. And also at the end, there will be another

chance for a Q&A with all speakers, where we can hear Kirsty saying all sorts of incredible things. Thank you so much.

And now I would like to keep the good times going and bring out our next guest, Melissa Hale. So, Melissa is a proud deaf woman, born and bred in Melbourne, Victoria. She has worked across a variety of leadership roles in the community and social services sector for 15 years, primarily in the disability advocacy space, and is currently Policy and Advocacy Manager of DANA. Maybe you can tell me how to pronounce that one, Melissa?

MELISSA HALE: "Dar-nah."

SKYE CUSACK: Would you also mind giving a brief visual description of yourself?

MELISSA HALE: Yes, hello, everybody. Melissa speaking. So, I have glasses on. I am a 40-year-old woman and I have blondish-brownish hair, and a black top on.

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you. So, we've heard a bit from Kirsty about inclusive communities and how people can feel most included in their communities. Given what we've heard, I'm wondering how do we make this happen across local communities?

MELISSA HALE: Thanks, Skye. So, what I found very interesting about what we just heard is that so many of the good stories that many of our respondents to The Dialogue's questions named out the accessibility rights that we already have - access to public transport, access to beaches, employment, cafes, and other community spaces. These are basic human rights.

We don't just need access - of course, we need access - but we don't just need access. We need inclusion. We don't just need to get in the door. We absolutely have the right to this, and we should be expecting this. Inclusion is how we feel once we're in that door, and we need to belong and be genuinely considered.

But what we've learned is that doing a one-time event or a program doesn't actually fix things. What really works is helping organisations properly by giving them time, training and support, instead of just telling them, "Be nicer or be more welcoming." So, it's not that sports clubs, art groups or other community places don't want to include people with disabilities, they usually do want to, but the real problem is they don't know how or they've not got enough staff or time to figure it out. I mean, many of these places are run by volunteers who have never met a person with disability before, so they don't really have the confidence. They've got plenty of willingness, but they just don't know what they don't know. So, it's not that people don't care, it's just that they need help and training to actually be able

to do it well.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, it's about that practicality. So, can you tell us about the Inclusive Communities Fund?

MELISSA HALE: Yep, OK. So, actually, this practicality is exactly the problem that the Government is trying to solve, and that's what the new Inclusive Communities Fund is about. So, basically, the Government put in \$200 million towards this over three years. The goal is to help more people with disabilities get involved in everyday community life. So, things like sport, art, music, culture, and just spaces where people can hang out with other people. So, the money will go towards helping regular community groups - sports clubs, theatre groups, community gardens, volunteer groups, all sorts - become better at including everybody.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, and so what is the aim of the Inclusive Communities Fund?

MELISSA HALE: OK, so the money is meant to help these organisations get better at including people, but not directly provide services to individual people. So, it can be used for things like getting advice on how to run things better - like business advice, planning, or leadership advice - training staff and volunteers, and learning how to include people with disabilities, or disability awareness training. Or buying equipment and making changes to buildings so they're easier to access - things like ramps or better facilities. But it can't be used to pay for direct one-to-one support for a person with disability - that's not what it's for.

But there's one important thing that we all need to remember - the same time that this fund is starting, the Government is also reducing the amount of money that individual NDIS participants get for social and community activities, starting in October 2026. So, basically the idea is, instead of giving each person money to go and do things in the community, the Government wants to spend money making the whole community itself more inclusive and welcoming and accessible for everyone. However, right now, the whole plan is still being finalised and discussed, and that's why we've got a consultation open at the moment, ending on 31 August, which is why it's so important for our voices to be involved in that consultation process.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, thank you.

TODD WINTHER: Melissa, going back to how to make communities inclusive and some of the barriers we face, a commenter in the chat said, "A lack of education surrounding differing needs could be one of the issues if disabilities aren't in someone's immediate circle and the

people in charge of these facilities, who may know there is room for improvement, but maybe don't know where to start. An inclusive tool kit sounds so great to bring to these community spaces." Melissa, what do you think about the idea of inclusive tool kits?

MELISSA HALE: Well, my thoughts on this are a tool kit is a tool kit, right? But I think the biggest impact will be if people with disabilities themselves are doing direct, one-to-one training with the people doing the activity. Because there is nothing like people with disability, people with lived experience, doing that direct, one-to-one training. Because if it's a tool kit, people working with other people - I mean, you learn more working with other people and learning from other people, and being able to open the questions with other people. That way, you get to know what it is to be with people with disability, to understand how to work with people with disabilities, by being in the same room together.

But a tool kit, on paper, can sometimes not have that effect. So, I think the concept is kind of what the Government wants to look at, but I really think people with disabilities really are key to this process. They need to be involved in person and really in their communities, delivering this work themselves. They know what works.

TODD WINTHER: Thanks.

SKYE CUSACK: Someone in the chat said, "When accessible formats are provided of information without us having to ask, it helps me feel included, such as Easy Read. Is this something the fund could help provide - more information in lots of different formats?"

MELISSA HALE: Yes. Yes. That could come under things like, you know, buying equipment or making changes to buildings. That sort of falls under the same sort of infrastructure changes. So, that could be something. But it could also come under something like training and how to train staff to include people with disability. But it's more like... I would love to see things like, sure, producing things in Easy Read, but actually teaching people why it's important to do things in Easy Read. You know? And that way, maybe they'll start thinking about, "OK, this is why it's important to do things in Easy Read. Why are we not doing things in Easy Read in the first instance? Why are we making things too complicated straightaway?" So, it's about going a bit deeper than just producing the resources. It's about actually educating the community on, "How do we make things more inclusive so anyone can show up as they are and be able to participate in their local communities?"

TODD WINTHER: So, we've got another question in the chat, and that is, "How do we ask community members to make sure we are more inclusive for everyone?"

MELISSA HALE: How do we make sure...?

TODD WINTHER: How do we make sure...?

MELISSA HALE: ..we are more inclusive for everyone?

TODD WINTHER: Yeah, how do we make sure that we spread the inclusive framework and ideology so that everybody can understand it in the community?

MELISSA HALE: That's an interesting question. I think it's about coming at it with a mindset of, "I have the right to be involved in whatever it is that I want to be involved in." For example, I myself, I play cricket and I'm a deaf person, and I play cricket with my local cricket club. And I have...I've had to come to a point where I said to my leaders in my cricket club, "This is what I need from you to make this work for me." Because they are willing to be inclusive and they are willing to change things to make things inclusive, they've made the changes across the club to make that inclusive for me. But to do that on a broader scale, we need to be...we need to claim our space. We need to say, "We want to be here. We have the right to be here." Not just, "Can we be here?" but, "We have the right to be here and this is what you need to change to make it inclusive for us." We've seen these changes with women in sport. And it's not, "Can we be a part of your sport club?" It's, "We're here, we're showing up, we're going to be a part of this sports club." We can do the same with disability.

TODD WINTHER: Someone also mentioned cricket in the chat, so it's a hot topic. So, like you said, Melissa, we're seeing a few questions about sport. One commenter said that they're a part of the Australian Blind Football Team and that they are always struggling to find funding to book soccer pitches to play and practise the sport. Could the fund help with that?

MELISSA HALE: No. Because the fund is about creating inclusive communities. So, the fund is about, you know, if you wanted to... I know Blind AFL, it's a whole different sport stream, but it would be about, say, focusing on your local football club and saying, "You need to become more inclusive of people who are blind, and this is how you need to do this work." So, it will be more about focusing on existing infrastructure and making that existing infrastructure inclusive for people with disability, rather than disability groups using the fund to do disability-type activities.

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you for that clarification. I think that leads well into this last question. So, someone else in the chat asked, "What can people with disabilities do on an individual level to increase inclusivity in the community?"

MELISSA HALE: Claim your space. Expect access. Like, expect inclusion. And even though that does take a bit of load, it is about saying, "I want to do this art group. I want to be in this sports club. I want to be a part of this community group. This is how it needs to work for me." And naming that and just coming at it with a sense of "people don't know what they don't know". Don't ask nicely. Expect access.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, I actually love this, like, girl-boss energy. And I think we all need to bring this girl-boss energy into, yeah, not asking, but, "We are here and we exist, and so, therefore, we are allowed to have inclusion in society." So, thank you so much, Melissa. I'm gonna take this girl-boss energy with me for the rest of this meeting. I love this. And thank you to everyone in the audience for all the questions. This was really great.

TODD WINTHER: Alright, everyone. We're gonna take a 10-minute break to grab a drink or some food, or maybe even reflect on the discussion. Have a breather and have a stretch, or come back and check your emails and feel recharged. We'll see you back here in 10 minutes.

(BREAK)

TODD WINTHER: And we're back! Next, I'd like to bring up our next speakers, Sonia Hume and Riley Buchanan. Sonia is an Inclusion Adviser at Inclusion Australia and a member of The Disability Dialogue Steering Committee. Until recently, she was also a member of Inclusion Australia's Policy Reference Group. Sonia was also Members President of Speak Out Advocacy for 2.5 years, and also the Tasmanian Member for Inclusion Australia's Our Voice Committee. Sonia is currently the North-West Tasmanian representative for Speak Out.

Riley is the Policy and Advocacy Manager for Inclusion Australia, the peak national body representing people with intellectual disabilities and their family. She is lucky to have worked with many self-advocates over the years across projects and policy. Riley lives and works on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja. Welcome, Sonia and Riley. Could you please say hello and give a visual description of yourself?

SONIA HUME: Hello. I'm Sonia. I'm a person with an intellectual disability. I'm 53 years' old,

have grey hair, glasses, and currently wearing a T-shirt that says, "Having a say forever." And I am from the Palawa people in Lutruwita, Tasmania.

RILEY BUCHANAN: Hi. I'm very lucky to be joining you from Whadjuk Noongar Boodja. Thanks so much, Todd. You did great with the pronunciation. Thank you so much for having us.

TODD WINTHER: I practised yesterday! Thank you, both. I will lead you to tell us what inclusive communities could and should look like for people with intellectual disability. Over to you, Riley.

RILEY BUCHANAN: Thank you, Todd. So, I get the very great pleasure of interviewing you, Sonia. So, thanks so much for being here and for your time, and all of the chats we have been able to have about inclusive communities and what that means for people with an intellectual disability. So, thank you for being here and speaking on behalf of your community, in which you're a really important leader and self-advocate. So, I want to start with a question, which is, what makes a community feel welcome and inclusive for you?

SONIA HUME: Everyone has a right to feel welcome, safe and included in their community. People with intellectual disability have the same rights as everyone else. When you don't feel included, you can feel left out, and it can affect your self-esteem. Bullying, being judged, or being treated differently can make people scared to go out. I've experienced bullying, including on buses, and that can make you worried about going out into the community. Community attitudes can be a barrier to making communities inclusive. People might also not know what events, groups or activities are available in their community. Accessible information is really important because people have a right to understand information and find their way around the community. If information isn't accessible, people can be left out on the outside because they don't know what is happening or how they can take part. Having people who communicate clearly and respectfully can make a huge difference.

RILEY BUCHANAN: Thanks, Sonia. I think those are all such important points. And a few people have mentioned Easy Read today, which is fantastic, and Melissa Hale from DANA talked a little bit about this too. I think it's important to remember because, when we think about access to the community, often we can think about, like, physical access to a building - like ramps and other ways to make sure that places are accessible.

Which is all very, very important. And for people with an intellectual disability, it's very often the information and communication and wayfinding and having support to make

decisions, and those other sometimes less visible parts of inclusivity. So, I think that's really, really important, and certainly something that we hear from people with intellectual disability a lot when it comes to inclusion. Can I ask you as well, Sonia, what do you need, and what do we know a lot of people with intellectual disability need to be able to get out and be part of your community?

SONIA HUME: Having a support worker is very important for lots of people with an intellectual disability. I rely on support workers to help me get out into the community, including grocery shopping and going to different places. I don't have family I can rely on for this support, so my support workers are especially important. Without support, I could become more isolated and wouldn't be able to do the things I want to do in my community. It is important that people don't just think about whether a community is inclusive. People also need the support to actually get there and participate. If people lose their NDIS funding, having an inclusive community doesn't always mean they can be part of it.

RILEY BUCHANAN: Yeah, it's such an important message, Sonia. It reminds me a little bit of what Melissa was talking about in terms of some of the structural barriers that we also need to make sure we're thinking about. So, it's great that government wants to put some money into making communities more inclusive. But if people can't leave the house because their NDIS plans have been cut, it doesn't do them a lot of good, I suppose. Did you want to add anything about that? Or we can move on to the last question. But if you had anything about, you know, the supports that people need to actually access their communities, just if you wanted to add anything further, but it's OK if not.

SONIA HUME: Yeah, no.

RILEY BUCHANAN: Move on. I think you cover it in the next question as well.

SONIA HUME: Actually, yes, there is. Like, I... At the moment, I do a leisure program on a Friday, so I go tenpin bowling with my support services. And if they stop the NDIS, like, the Community Participation part, I won't be able to do that. Yeah, so then I... 'Cause I really like bowling and I just get out in my community and mingle with people. And if they stop that, well, then that's not gonna happen. So...

RILEY BUCHANAN: Yeah, thank you for sharing it. It's a great example, Sonia. And it just shows, like, the really holistic supports that are needed. So, you can make a community really inclusive out here, and that's fantastic, but if people don't have the supports they need

to be able to access things in the way that they want to, then it can exclude a lot of people. And we know that, like from your example - and from lots of people with an intellectual disability - people do rely on social groups and their NDIS supports to be able to get out and about in their communities and build relationships and have those informal supports, and be visible in their communities - which we know is really important for health and safety, for everybody as well.

So, thank you for sharing. It's a really good example. I want to ask you the next question that we talked about, which is, what happens when people don't have enough money or support to take part in their communities?

SONIA HUME: A lot of people with intellectual disability don't have much money or resources to fall back on. For example, family support. The Disability Support Pension is not enough for many people to afford all the things they need to live a good life. The cost of living is making things harder because everything is getting more expensive. If someone loses their NDIS funding, and Community Participation, they can't just always just pay for those supports themselves. People may have to choose between basic needs and doing social things or getting out into the community. Losing support can mean people stay home more, become isolated, and don't have the same opportunities to see friends or be part of their communities.

I know from my own experience that isolation can have a big impact on your mental health state. We need to think about the Inclusive Communities Fund with other system changes, like NDIS supports and income support. You can make communities as inclusive as possible, but people still need enough money and support to actually participate. The NDIS was meant to make people's lives better. Cutting the supports people rely on can make people's lives worse and increase isolation.

RILEY BUCHANAN: I think that's so well said, Sonia.

SONIA HUME: Sorry, I've just got a croaky voice!

RILEY BUCHANAN: No, you're fine. We heard you loud and clear. What you said about we need to think about the Inclusive Communities Fund with other system changes, I think that's absolutely huge and a very, very true statement. As you said, you know, most people who are relying on the NDIS, and definitely the big, big majority of people with an intellectual disability are relying on income support - so, Centrelink payments - as their primary source of income. So, that means most people are living in poverty because especially payments like JobSeeker are so far below the poverty line. And so it's so important to think about the

supports and resources that people really need to actually get out and be in their communities, as well as doing all of the work to make those communities inclusive. Thanks, Sonia. I think we're gonna hand back to Todd and Skye and maybe get some questions from the audience. Thanks, Sonia, that was fantastic.

SONIA HUME: Thank you.

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you so much, Sonia and Riley. I'm actually gonna jump in with a question of my own, if that's OK. I'm hijacking! Sonia, I felt really connected to what you were saying because I was actually born in north-west Tasmania in the Latrobe Hospital and I grew up on Palawa Country for most of my life. As someone with intellectual disability, it was hard for me to find a sense of community when I was growing up and I wasn't aware of a lot of programs that were around and, kind of, organisations or community that could support me. And then when I moved to Melbourne, it just felt like there were a lot of programs and things that were available to me because I was living in a bigger city. And I was just wondering, as someone who is connected to Tasmania and maybe, like, represents Tasmania, do you think it's different in Tasmania than it is in other states and bigger cities?

SONIA HUME: Yeah, I think it is different, because, like, as you know, Tassie is just a small area and, yeah, so there's not much out there for people with intellectual disability to do as much. So...

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, thank you. And a lot of people are thanking you in the chat as well, Sonia, for sharing your experiences. I'm just gonna ask another question, sorry. Please, if you have a question, feel free, otherwise I'm just gonna keep asking. What do you hope will happen in Tasmania moving forward? Like, what changes would you like to see?

SONIA HUME: The changes that I would like to see is that the NDIS doesn't go ahead with the changes. And also the attitudes of other people about a person with a disability. Because that's a very big barrier for people with an intellectual disability, or any disabilities. And I'm a big believer, whether you've got a disability or not, everyone has equal rights.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, I agree.

TODD WINTHER: Very true. Sonia, I like your idea about the Inclusive Communities Fund and how we have to think about other systems as well, that it shouldn't really act on its own. What do you think that people with an intellectual disability feel that they need to do to fully

participate and feel safe? And what other systems do we need to think about?

SONIA HUME: I'm not sure on that question.

TODD WINTHER: So, what are some other services that you use alongside your NDIS support? And how do you think they might work together? Do you get involved in other community activities outside your NDIS funding?

SONIA HUME: No, not really. Just, um, yeah. Yeah, I don't think I'd be able to go out into the community if I didn't have my NDIS funding because I have fears that people would be judgemental. Yeah, and I am... I'm a bit frightened of going out in the community on my own, for personal reasons.

TODD WINTHER: Yeah. I totally understand that too, about being a person with a disability and feeling judged because I look different and I move around different in the community. The community isn't always inviting for people with disabilities. So, I understand your feelings there.

SONIA HUME: Yeah.

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you so much to Sonia and Riley. This was a really great discussion, and nice for me to talk about Tassie! I don't get to do that very much these days, so thank you so much for that.

I am gonna bring back Melissa Hale, if that's OK. Thank you again. Because Melissa and I are gonna have a, kind of, yarn about - you know, in this next part of the event... What am I saying? I've got Tassie on the brain, I can't think of anything else! For this next part of our event, Melissa, welcome back. We've heard a lot about what inclusive communities could look like, and even how they could work, but I think a question on a lot of people's minds is how can these be funded and where the money could come from. So, Melissa, what could this funding do well if it's set up properly?

MELISSA HALE: Thanks, Skye. So, in an ideal world, and if it's set up right, the focus should be giving this money to groups run by disabled people, not just mainstream organisations. And this is because disability-led groups already know what actually works in their local areas way better than some big, top-down program designed by people who don't live that experience of being excluded because of their disability. We just heard, from the session before with Riley and Sonia from Inclusion Australia, about the very real impact of

what that experience looks and feels like. So, they hold those solutions and know what works.

The fund should also help community groups build those long-term skills, not just for one-off events. I don't want to see things like a Disability Awareness Day, or a Come and Try Day that happens once and then is forgotten. The money should go towards training staff in an ongoing way and helping places become genuinely comfortable with including disabled people permanently and in a way they want to be supported, not just for a day. It should support things that look like a trusted local hub, where people know they can get connected with activities and groups, like a friendly Neighbourhood House, instead of guessing where to start, and building on what already exists and is doing good work.

But it's really, really important that people with disability are central to the solutions here. Someone in the chat mentioned that, in the mental health field, there is a concept called "social prescribing", and that basically means that it's recognised in the mental health field how important social connection is for improved mental health, and ensuring that connection and belonging is a part of a good life. It's a recognised thing, right?

So, it's really, really, really important that we get this right at the start, so we don't have disabled people becoming isolated, getting poor mental health. And Sonia really clearly flagged that as a risk earlier, so it's really important we get this right at the start.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, I completely agree. In that same spirit of getting things right at the start and making sure that this is good for people with disability, why do you think it's important for people with disability to be part of the consultation process?

MELISSA HALE: Yeah. So, at the moment, the fund is still in its consultation process, so they're still designing it. So, the timing is kind of - the timing is a bit messed up. So, the \$2 million fund is starting at the same time, as I mentioned earlier, starting at the same time as individual NDIS budgets for social activities are getting cut, starting October 2026. So, this means, when the NDIS Bill passes, people's personal funding for Social and Community Participation will start to get reduced before this new Community Fund even has programs up and running. So, disability advocacy groups like DANA are worried about that gap. It's a bit like taking away your bike to get to places before building a bus stop. You know what I mean?

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah.

MELISSA HALE: So, another thing that we are worried about is that group activities aren't right for everybody. So, some people don't just need a welcoming community, they need that

one-on-one support from a support worker just to leave the house or to get through the door. So, the fund can't replace that kind of personal support. You'd have to work alongside it, instead of replace it. So, it is important disabled people are involved in this consultation because they need to help design the fund from the start, and not just get asked for feedback after all the big decisions are already made.

That's called co-design and it's way more meaningful than just being consulted at the end, when nothing can really change anymore. So, right now, the consultation is just opening - really important. There's a small window where people can speak up and actually shape how this fund works, and what inclusion really looks like. And this conversation will be a part of that, and I really encourage everyone on this call to make submissions, give ideas, tell them what "good" looks like, tell them what you're afraid of, and to speak up. Because once the decisions are made, it's much harder to change.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, yeah. It's good to get that kind of sorted from the beginning, so there's no... I totally agree. And I am seeing that we've included the link in the chat for everyone here in this call to make a submission to. As Melissa said, it's really important for people with disability to have our say in this consultation. And then I just have one more quick question about who can get funding, because I think that is, like, something that the chat seems really interested in, and I think it's important to kind of make that clear. So, someone in the chat said, "Can local government and boards apply for funding? Could my local restaurant, which is inaccessible, apply for funding?"

MELISSA HALE: Could your local restaurant apply for funding?

SKYE CUSACK: I think someone has a favourite local restaurant that is inaccessible to them, and they're wondering could that restaurant apply for funding to make it more accessible, or is there a different type of funding that could support the restaurant in that way? Is that what this could specifically help with?

MELISSA HALE: I would have to take that on notice. The answer is no, because I'm not actually quite sure. Because the purpose of it is to make the community more inclusive, but it does actually fund bits of equipment and things to make things more inclusive. Maybe, maybe not - I don't know. So, I won't try to answer that one.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah. And I think, you know, if people are interested in making a submission or reaching out to ask those questions, I think they're good questions to ask, just to get clarity on, "What can this be used for and what can this not be used for?" What I'm

hearing, Melissa, and let me know if this is wrong, this is the perfect time for people with disability to be asking these questions?

MELISSA HALE: Yeah.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah. OK, great. Thank you so much, Melissa. Now we're gonna get the whole gang back together. I'd love Todd to come back and all of the speakers for our final Q&A. So, welcome back to Sonia and Riley and Kirsty. And, Melissa, while we're talking, I might give this one to you. Like, why stop a good time?!

As we have another question about the Inclusive Communities Fund, someone said, "I work for local government and organise an annual arts trail, where we have 300 artists and 20,000 visits. Can we use the fund to engage someone to provide education to the artists on how to make their studios inclusive for all?" I'm not sure if you have something to say, or is it the same thing of, like, we need to double-check that?

MELISSA HALE: That's what I'm thinking. The consultation phase for the fund and how it's going to work, it's open now. So, I'm not actually sure we're able to answer with any great authority about who actually can apply, while the consultation phase is up and running. So, I'm not actually sure, yeah. But it sounds like people have some great ideas of how you might make your communities more inclusive, which is going to the point that people with disabilities are holding these answers.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, thank you.

TODD WINTHER: We have a comment in the chat that says, "Shifting attitudes and behaviours happens incrementally over time." We have a fan of Melissa, who is quoting about not wanting a tokenistic Awareness Day, "Also giving the funding to people with disabilities to design our own solutions." So, Kirsty, I'd like to bring you in here. What have you learned in your research about shifting attitudes from tokenistic to true co-design?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Yeah, the research that was done for the Disability Royal Commission was really clear on this - that you have to have people with disability at the table for the solutions to work. So, we've got really clear evidence on that. In terms of what it takes to shift things, we've had a couple of things said today that I think it would be important to emphasise. One-off events are not what changes things. We need to change things structurally so that local councils, for example, have a plan to always make all of their events inclusive. Local sporting clubs have the capacity to think about what they will need to do to

include, so when people with disability turn up and demand to be accepted, as Melissa said, that they have the capability to do that. So, we need to make sure those things are part of a solution. The additional piece that The Achieve Foundation is interested in bringing to the table is these tools about how we talk differently about disability.

So, how we move from our current mindset of a deficit base to a mindset that says, "We have amazing humans that look different, that have different capabilities, and that all have the possibility to come together to make us a better society, and we're just being really silly if we don't take advantage of that."

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you. So, I have a question for Sonia and Riley. Why is it important for people with disability to speak up and share their stories?

SONIA HUME: I think it's important so people know that their voices are heard and that they are listened to. Because, sometimes, people with a disability don't think that they're getting listened to, especially with the Government, with the changes to the NDIS, our voices aren't getting heard about that. And I think the Government should come and trade places with people with an intellectual disability, or any disability, for a week and see how they...so they know how a person with a disability is treated in the community.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, I completely agree.

TODD WINTHER: Melissa, how can we find out what meets the criteria? You've done a great job of answering these questions, but where can people find more info?

MELISSA HALE: Great question. I think the link will have all the information that you need. Because at the moment there's no other additional information. So, the link that was shared in the chat is probably your best bet at this point. Thank you.

TODD WINTHER: Thanks, Melissa. Skye, I'll throw it over to you.

SKYE CUSACK: Thank you. So, I think we've had a lot of really good conversations about, like, all of the really serious impacts. But I think it would be nice to, kind of, end this on a more positive note. It is very serious and very important, but I also think there's lots of really - just personally - I think there's lots of really beautiful, positive things about being part of the disability community and getting to speak and connect like this.

And so this is a question for everyone, and I also think, like, Todd as well, if you have anything you want to share, this is just for everyone. Like, all of these changes we've talked

about and all of the work that's happening, and all of the things we're sharing to become more inclusive, like, what excites you all about this and about what's coming up in the future?

TODD WINTHER: Well, if we're looking to replace NDIS funding - which is what this community funding is designed to do - to try and make it inclusive for people with disability means making it inclusive for everyone. If you make things inclusive for the disability community, it's inclusive for everyone. It's not just people with disability who win in this case, it's the community at large. And maybe that's a message we have to keep sending to the politicians as they weigh up the pros and many cons of this legislation as well.

SKYE CUSACK: Yeah, does anyone else have anything to build on that, or anything that you guys are excited about?

KIRSTY NOWLAN: Just to emphasise that the disability community is really a remarkable community living in a world that is not designed for you and your needs, and working out every single day how to make your life work, and how to be who you want to be in the world. This community has what it takes to support the rest of Australia to work it out, so I think there are so many things to be positive about, while we've got to maintain the serious work of the critique of things that are also wrong.

TODD WINTHER: Yes, building on your comment, Kirsty, it amazes me, as somebody who grew up in the mainstream education system, that I always was taught how to fit into a mainstream world and yet the mainstream community wasn't taught how to fit into an accessible world. So, maybe we can start the journey here.

So, with that, I'd like to wrap up and thank everybody. I'm afraid that's all we have time for today. It's been great having you all here, sharing your ideas about what truly makes communities inclusive. A reminder that we'll be submitting this Open Dialogue recording as part of The Disability Dialogue's submission to the Government's consultation on Inclusive Communities. Thank you to our speakers and everyone who shared their questions in the chat. You can even send your own submission. It can be as simple or as thorough as you like. We've included a link in the chat for you to learn more and make a submission directly. The consultation is open and closes on August 31. It can be a written or video submission and there's also an option to request a phone call. We want to encourage everyone who wants to send in a submission to do so. It's really important for the Government to hear directly from people with lived experience about what inclusive communities could and should look like.

SKYE CUSACK: And just a final reminder that we will be sending you a survey after this event and there should be a pop-up on your screen after this event is over.

The next Open Dialogue is a really exciting one and it's gonna be a little different to what we usually do. So, next time, The Disability Dialogue is travelling to the community of Thursday Island/Waiben in September to meet the community and hear what it's like to live in a remote area with a disability. That's really exciting to me specifically because, as a First Nations person, I think when we talk about "inclusion" it's important that we're also thinking of people of colour, people who live in remote communities, people who are culturally and linguistically diverse, so I'm just really excited to hear about that. I think that's an important part of inclusion that I think about a lot in my work. I'm excited to hear about that, just as a fan. This event that's happening next time is a closed, in-person event to hear directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Thank you again to everyone for taking the time to be here, and we will all see you back again online in October. So, bye for now!

TODD WINTHER: Thank you, everyone.

(End of Transcript)