**Making Advocacy Accessible Webinar**

Transcript from video of Janel Manns from PWDA presenting on 1 June 2023.

That was a fabulous introduction by Elly. Just to recap there, Elly was talking about how many Australians live with disability. And I think the really interesting thing to keep in mind is there are 4.4 million people in Australia living with disability. If you are not including people with disability in your campaigns, wow, you are missing out on including a huge, huge group that can certainly go a long way in assisting you with campaigning, and all the work that goes on in the background.

What I do want to cover today is just some aspects around including people with disability in campaigns, really practical information. I will be popping some links into the chat but you will also receive this in a PDF form once we've finished today. I think it will probably be best, given we're on a tight timeframe to save questions till last. Please, as we progress, feel very welcome to pop your questions in the chat.

Okay. So the first thing I wanted to look at today was very briefly just barriers to inclusion of people with disability. Elly covered that quite well, so I will fundamentally recap what she was speaking about. There is four primary areas that you need to look at when you're planning, and you should be pre‑planning. It's much better to have plans and options in place before somebody turns up wanting to be included in campaigns or in advocacy work. So the four areas are physical, informational, attitudinal and systems and protocols. At the end of the day I think we can all visualise physical relatively well. It's the built environment that blocks a lot of people with disability from participating in many things in life. So when we look at physical we are looking at things like stairs, ramps, access to different areas, but it goes beyond wheelchair. Often when we think about physical we think of wheelchair. You know, Elly spoke about the gentleman who was sight impaired. He had physical barriers because he needed assistance to find his way around different areas, different geographic areas that were not familiar to him. So don't discount that just because somebody is not in a wheelchair that they won't need to have assistance or a plan B in place to take care of different physical aspects, whether that's out and about in the community or inside the office, inside the building where the campaign trail is being formed up and everybody is coming together.

The other thing around physical, too, is that movement around places. So, you know, you don't want cluttered environments and that's for a range of people with disability once again, not just wheelchairs.

Information is a really interesting space. And you will have some links to help you along with this. By "information" we mean everything from the way in which you communicate, through to flyers, through to sharing information with people with disability who are part of campaigning, and, you know, it goes without saying that if you can provide information in formats that suit people with intellectual or learning disability, you've just provided information that suits everyone in society. So, you know, it's really important that you think about the means by which the formats by which you are communicating not just to colleagues and those involved in campaigning but also community members that you are trying to encourage to maybe vote in a particular way or have their say about something. People with disability are extremely excluded if communication and information is only verbal or only in average written format. So you will be given some links that will take you on a journey around exploring things with information. Attitudinal goes without saying. We all need to stop and question our attitudes towards people with disability. And I think, unfortunately, we have a society that has very low expectation of disability. And also our brains go straight to the, "Oh my gosh, can't do", and some very negative perceptions around people with disability. And I think you would be quite shocked ‑ some people would be quite shocked to find that the skills and knowledge and capability that the disabled community can bring to you, can bring to a campaign, can bring to an organisation. And I say that also because we have a different lens in the way we look at society. So we can bring a wealth of perspectives for you. And we can bring perspectives that many may not think of. So we all need to check our unconscious bias and our prejudices and our beliefs about people with disability and just check is this true, is this fact or is this myth? And I really encourage you to also get out and about, meet people with disability because you will actually find this low expectation, this expectation that people with disability are a burden or not very skilled, can't do very much ‑ you will find that that's actually not the case. It's quite a myth. And then lastly, systems protocols. You know, we can't do a lot about the systemic issues that impact people with disability. We can't do a lot in that space immediately and change things immediately. Systemic change takes time. But what we can do is look at our organisation, what protocols are in place that bring about inclusion for all walks of people, but also what protocols or policies do we have in place that may be blocking or may be denying people with disability opportunity to participate.

So the way in which you function internally is really, really important while you are working on that bigger systemic space.

The other thing I wanted to touch on here too is, you know, there are so many disability types and there are some generic, typical behaviours and systems across different disability types but then each human with disability is a variation. You can't always assume. So not every wheelchair user is the same or has the same needs, for example. Not every hearing impaired person has the same needs.

So what you will be given today is a link that will take you to information to help you unpack different things that you could do to bring about inclusion that are generally suitable for different disability types. But as Elly was saying, it also comes down to having a conversation with each individual who has a disability, not making assumptions, having a conversation.

But some of the things that you may well find can impact people with disability ‑ so impact inclusion ‑ might be things like concentration. If someone has an acquired brain injury, stamina. I'm a wheelchair user. I get really tired because I'm navigating the able‑bodied world. So my stamina really takes a beating at times. Capacity to cope with pressure and timeframes and multiple tasks. I mean, a lot of this fits people without disability as well. But it's just some people will have different things impacting them in their lives where that ability to cope with a lot of pressure or multiple tasks is not good at different times in their life. Interaction with others, communication, I spoke with that when I spoke about information. Managing stress. We all need support to manage our stress well. And also you will find a lot of people with disability will be reluctant to join in, reluctant to ask for guidance, reluctant to ask questions, even. And that's because we are used to being rejected. So, you know, you need to create a safe space and as we walk through these slides, there will be some information for you in regard to things you can do to create a space that communicates to people with disability that you are not tolerating disability; you're celebrating and welcoming disability. There are no negatives there. People feel very welcome to come and work with you and work within your organisation. And by doing that you will find people with disability will then feel quite comfortable to ask questions, speak up if they've got particular needs. So it is very much about creating a safe culture or a safe space.

I'm just going to pop these into the link because there is way too much information here to pop on slides. Sorry, I have jumped ahead, sorry. No, I haven't. My apologies. Okay. So at People with Disability we have a document, 30 ways to make your service more accessible. You can use that as a tick list. There will be some things there that you or your organisation will be able to do immediately and there might be some things there that you need to put a bit of work or thought into, and you can put on a bucket list to be addressed over time. When we talk about making adjustments, as I mentioned earlier, there are so many different disability types and then within each different disability types every human is unique. So there is a website available that offers, and that link hasn't worked, my apologies, I will send that through later. There is a list available at Job Access. And it is amazing. I love it. I use it all the time. It carries all different disability types and just a mountain of suggestions around making adjustments, including people with disability. You can't go past it. It is fantastic to use. And as much as at the front end it talks about employing people with disability, just ignore that and still go to the website and use it; the information is incredible.

And if you are actually in an organisation thinking of employing people with disability to participate in campaigns, you will also be able to access information about potential funding available to bring about inclusive work spaces and things like that.

The other resource, creating a Disability Inclusion Action Plan. I think I'm going to wait and copy these into the link towards the end because that last copy and paste didn't work.

So when we look at Disability Inclusion Action Plans, that's a bigger picture. That's something you put on your bucket list as an organisation. But it is something that you should be investigating, exploring, having conversations about. It is a longer term project. It is not an immediate fix. But, you know, when we look at systems and protocols and processes, sometimes it can just feel so overwhelming to look at what is already there in place in an organisation and find the time to make adjustments to bring about more inclusivity. So when we talk about a Disability Inclusion Action Plan that can be an adjunct to existing policies and processes. And it is very, very handy because if you go about creating a DIAP in the right way, it will be a process that unfolds where your organisation will then be able to action unfolding protocols and processes where you start to bring about ‑ or you start to brainstorm ideas around inclusivity. And by actually incorporating those ideas and new protocols and processes into a document, you are formalising, so you are sending a very clear message to people with disability, that you are not going to just tolerate disability, you are going to embrace. And you are also creating a framework. And there is no better guidance than having a framework rather than being knee‑jerk or ad hoc around an approach to include people with disability.

And as I said, there's some links available that will inform you about Disability Inclusion Action Plans. So we will post those in the chat at the end of this.

Information ‑ look, I cannot talk about communication and information enough. Without communication, what have we got? It is the underpinning necessary to inclusivity. And a lot of people get scared because they meet people with disability with such a range of communication differences. You know, it might be somebody relying on Auslan, somebody with English as second language but also a disability, so an interpreter is needed, the way in which we ‑ people communicate with apps, iPads, different devices, cue cards, drawings. There's so many ways in which people with disability communicate.

And I really encourage you, rather than being averse to learning communication methods to embrace and to use them because you will find it's really handy to use even outside the realm of people with disability. You will step more skills and knowledge which is never a negative or bad thing in life to have additional skills and knowledge. But I can't stress enough without communication protocols in place, inclusion will never move past tolerance.

So the Commons Library, they have some fantastic resources. I was also having a look at them again yesterday around easy read. They have examples of easy read but also some incredible resources around how to go about creating easy read. And if you use easy read, you are meeting the needs of the whole community. And it's not just people with disability. We actually have a community where it is said that 42% of all adults of working age have very low literacy. So that's not just people with disability. So there is another cohort, people with low literacy that may also be missing out in campaigning because of the manner in which information is collated and distributed.

And on the left‑hand side of that slide, that's a very small example of what easy read looks like. Simple language, plain language, with pictures to help people understand.

I want to talk about power and oppression. And I know that those here today are people who already probably understand power and oppression quite well because you actually already are campaigning and we wouldn't be campaigning if it wasn't about imbalances of power. But I just wanted to touch on this just to remind you, I guess, more than anything, because I know you know this information. We know that having power embodies the capacity to make things happen. What you really need to be mindful of when welcoming people with disability is unconscious power, or the use of power. When we are not campaigning we sometimes fall into a mode where we're not as aware of what we're doing, what we're saying, what actions we're taking. So, you know, it's said that the disabled community is the largest minority group globally, and definitely the largest minority group in Australia, 4.4 million people but the least empowered. We've been invisible and our voices have been silenced forever and a day.

So, you know, when you are working with people with disability, or you are trying to be very inclusive, just stop and think about your own power, the power as an able‑bodied person, or the power as a person of, say, a position in an organisation, like a line manager, CEO. What power do I carry? How am I using my power? And is that contributing to inclusion of people with disability or is that posing a barrier? Do I need to be more conscious of my use of power?

And it goes without saying you want to create situations where there is power with collaboration, solidarity. You also want to create situations where you give power to people with disability, and situations where people with disability are feeling that they are in such a safe environment when they're working with your organisation, or with you individually, that that people with disability feels valued. Not just welcomed, but valued. There is tokenism and then there is genuine inclusion. And we, as people with disability, we need to be valued, to be able to feel that we are worthy of participating, and we are worthy of being heard and worthy of being seen. And you can't go past, when you are working with people with disability, handing power to a people with disability. We will notice that because the majority of situations we find ourselves in publicly are very disempowering. So, you know, just stop and reflect on the way in which you use power and how you can use that to an extreme advantage when you're working to bring about inclusion and communicate a culturally safe organisation or environment.

Building trust. People with disability experience abuse, neglect, violence, sexual assault and domestic violence at four times the rate of non‑disabled. And the reason I'm sharing this with you is because we are a community of trauma. We are a very resilient community and we are really, really strong people but we have experienced a lot of trauma and there will be ongoing trauma. We are just easy targets. And for the majority of us, each week you poke your nose outside your front door and go somewhere socially, we're on high alert because there may be a chance that we will be abused, or turned away from somewhere, or just ill‑treated in some form or another. So, you know, safety in environments, in organisations, in campaigning, it is really, really important for people with disability. Once again, you know, so you are not tokenistic in your inclusion. Part of power ‑ sorry, part of safety is very much about the way you communicate and you will be provided with a language guide sitting on the Commons Library site and it's a language guide created by People with Disability Australia. You will make mistakes at times with language and that's okay. And if you are unsure about what to say to people, or how to express, or you've made a mistake when you're talking with a person or people with disability, that's okay. We all make mistakes. Just acknowledge that and then move forward from there.

A good example there is, you know, I've been working in education, I've lived with a disability since the age of 4. And I was involved with some work recently with a friend who has psychosocial disability. And when we finished delivering our training we started talking about the weather and I think I said something along the lines to him, "Oh, gosh, isn't it crazy. The weather is so mad lately." And then we parted ways and I had a moment. I thought, "Oh my gosh, crazy, mad." That was really wrong for me to use that language around my colleague. Really wrong for me to even carry that language. So I picked up the phone, I went back to him and I told him what I thought about what I'd said and I apologised. And he said, "Oh, water off a duck's back, not a problem." You know, it's usually tone that is the problem more so than misused words. So, you know, we are a very forgiving community and we make mistakes, you make mistakes, all humans make mistakes.

But if you make a goal for yourself to just keep glancing through a language guide every week, you will pick up different bits and pieces. You don't have to read it from front to back and try to memorise it. Think about what am I saying, why am I saying this? Is it respectful language? What is my tone? Because we know tone can carry a lot more damage than words by themselves. Words can be very weaponised by tone. And you can see there on the screen there is quite a lot of dos and don'ts. By all means, you know, use respectful language, don't use negative or judgmental language. Don't minimise a person's lived experience when they are communicating with you. Validate a person's lived experience. Use positive language around that. Use body language. Show that you are listening, show that you are hearing, show that you feel that person or people are of value or worth. Demonstrate that you are engaging, you are not distracted by your watch, your phone, or something else going on.

You will find with some disabilities you need to allow time for cognitive processing. That can be difficult for some people, especially in able‑bodied land because everything moves at such a fast pace. But allow those quiet moments. Allow those spaces in time where it's not filled with noise. Allow people time to digest what you've communicated to them, regardless of what format that may be in, and allow them time to give their response in whatever format best suits them. And also, ensuring that we are all on the same page and understanding. There are some disability types where you will find people nodding and appearing as though they are understanding everything that's being spoken about but due to cognitive or intellectual issues, that person may not be following what you're talking about or what you're communicating. So you need to stop and check in and make sure that a person is actually understanding what you're communicating. And I guess an interesting facet around that is a lot of people with disability will just nod because we are used to conformity. We are used to being told what we must do. We are used to being powerless. So we often just agree with people when we are clueless about what is actually going on. And once again, that comes back to safety. That comes back to a person feeling safe enough to say, "What are you talking about? I don't understand."

As I said, that PWD language guide, we will make sure we give you that link after today. Nothing About Us Without Us! The disabled community, as you may already know anyway from campaigning, since the 70s when disability first started campaigning for rights, the catch cry came about, Nothing About Us Without Us! We must be included in all facets of your activity in regard to creating inclusivity because it's about us and we know best, we know what suits us best. Once again it's also a sign of value and respect. If you are not including people with disability in creating Disability Inclusion Action Plans, in discussing how to better be inclusive in environments or in organisations, then what you're doing is tokenistic. Without including us, you are not going to be fully informed in regard to our needs. You are only going to be guessing from your lens, from your perspective. So, you know, I can't stress enough that, you know, sometimes you might feel that you want to advocate on behalf of people with disability but just stop and check in with people with disability if that's actually a good choice or would they prefer to be at the front end and for you to walk beside them and assist them along the way. As it says there in that slide, sometimes the better approach is to amplify their voices, the voices of people with disability, by lowering your own voice.

Respectful inclusion. Take the time to educate. Avoid assuming you know everything there is to know about disability. When you educate, don't just rely on people with disability to educate you. You know, use the links that we are going to provide you today. Start to reach out to people in the community who have disability. Make conversations with people, join different groups where a lot of people with disability may congregate. Step out and start to choose to mix with the disabled community with the view of getting to know us, and you will be very welcome and you will learn so much. You will learn so much more than just relying on documentation, and formal training.

And I think, you know, a really, really interesting thing to take away with you today is we often find that when we are stepping out of our comfort zone and we are mixing with groups that we are not well versed about or we are the only one person within a group who doesn't actually have dark skin or doesn't actually have disability, we can feel uncomfortable. Any human feels uncomfortable. I really encourage you to lean into that discomfort. You will learn so much about yourself but you will also learn so much about what it feels like to be a person of minority. If you step into the disabled community as an individual and you feel nervous about language and you feel nervous about getting things wrong, you are experiencing a little bit of what it feels like to be of minority group. You know, every time I go out, I'm usually the only wheelchair user whipping around Woollies buying my groceries. It's at times quite uncomfortable for me because of people's reactions towards me. So, you know ‑ and I see the world from a different lens for that reason and this is what we need people without disability to be doing, to actually put yourself in a position of being uncomfortable because you will find a lot of lessons will come if you sit and reflect on experiences that you've had when mixing with people with disability.

Lastly, the thing I really encourage you to do is to check in. You know, once again, I mentioned earlier that people with disability are the least empowered globally, least empowered in Australia. If you check in with us, if you ask us questions, if you look for guidance from us, you are empowering us. You are saying, "You are of value, you are of worth. Please teach me, help me learn." We will certainly be very, very happy to teach and help you learn. But we will feel so comfortable and so safe because you've actually handed that to us, you have asked to be guided. So, you know ‑ and when you are working in that space when you are doing your best to be inclusive and there is certain activities or actions that are being undertaken, make sure you do check in with people with disability just to make sure that you are actually doing more good than harm.

So just to recap, take the time to understand the different ways people with disability will communicate, avoid judgment and misunderstanding, be really creative in your communication style. And you might go, "Oh my gosh, how, how?" We have resources and it's really simple stuff you can do. Make sure that you are able to equip yourself with different communication methods without it being a knee‑jerk reaction or a panic. So, you know, I really encourage you to take the journey around communication with people with disability from today forward so then when you encounter people who have communication methods that are other than verbal and hearing, you will feel comfortable, you will feel relaxed. You might feel a little bit nervy but it won't look like, "Oh my gosh, the disabled person is here and what do I do?"

Focus on your trust. Focus on safety. Focus on building rapport. Demonstrate commitment to people with disability by showing that not only will you not judge, but you won't refuse them. Don't tell people which jobs you think they should do and which jobs you believe they can't do. You don't know unless you ask somebody what their actual capabilities are. And interestingly, I think you will find what you think certain people can't do, I think you will be pleasantly surprised to find that's not the case. Once again, it's about that cycle of low expectation that plagues people with disability.

Speak directly to the person with disability, not their carer. If somebody has got a support worker with them or a family member/carer, don't have the conversation with them and not be looking at the person with disability. That happens a heck of a lot and it's often uncomfortability that brings that about. It doesn't feel good. We see that. You feel unheard and unseen and most people will walk away. They won't feel that they want to become involved.

Also when somebody is ‑ when somebody has a support worker with them, just remember that it's not a spare set of hands. That person is there to provide the person with disability support around their needs. That person is not a spare set of hands for the campaign itself or the work itself. As I said before, don't assume that people can't do. Ask first. Use respectful and appropriate language and you will make mistakes at times but that's okay. Like I said, take hold of our language guide, download it, and just flick through it, day‑to‑day, weekly, whenever you've got a chance, and you will continue to then build your capacity around understanding respectful language when you are engaging with people with disability.

And you know, at the end of the day when it comes to barriers, we don't have all the answers but you would be surprised at what answers we do have because our day‑to‑day lives are lived from a perspective of often being confronted with barriers. So, you know, the best person to start with when you are looking at how do we overcome such and such barrier is the actual person or the group of people with disability. Go back to them first because you might spend hours trying to come up with ways to overcome a barrier and an individual or group of people with disability will have the answer and you've just lost a lot of hours out of your time.

So that's it from me. I guess this is an introduction ‑ I feel like this is the beginning of a journey in regard to your learning curve around disability, and I'm not discounting that there would be people here today who have possibly already started the journey. The reason I say it's the beginning of a journey is because I would just really love to see people step out of comfort zones, join different groups, join committees, go and do things in your local community where you know there will be people with disability. Strike up conversations, strike up friendships, strike up collaborative relationships for working and just keep exploring different ways to learn different things about people with disability. You can read journals, you can jump on websites and it goes without saying you can contact our organisation, People with Disability Australia, if you have got questions. If we don't have the answers we will definitely find those who do.

Thank you so much. And I really appreciate everybody today. You're here for all the right reasons. And I guess, you know, just in closing people with disability don't need rescuing. We need enabling to be a voice and to grow our power in the community and to be included, we need resourcing. We need you to walk beside us. And there is no greater resource than those without disability, because we are often overlooked and unheard, quite often people will listen to those who don't have disability before they will listen to those who do. So by striking up that relationship if you are an able‑bodied person with people with disability, you are in a very, very good position then to help be a voice for our cause, our needs.