**The Lives We Lead ABC Midwest Interview**

**23/07/2020**

**Michelle Stanley:** Michelle Stanley with you on ABC Midwest and Wheatbelt.

What’s your superpower? I’m not talking about flying or stopping time. I mean what’s that one thing that you can do in your office, or household, or group of friends that no one else can? You and I we all have one, but for people with disabilities people tend to focus on what they can’t do and that can make it really hard for them to find work.

So to turn that around WAiS, WA’s Individualised Services, is a support network for people and businesses, when it comes to supporting people with disabilities and it’s launched a social media project called The Lives We Lead. Liz Dutton is a reference group member for the project and Geraldine Mellet is the project Co Ordinator, they both join me.

Geraldine, what is The Lives We Lead all about?

**Geraldine Mellet**: So, The Lives We Lead is a project in two parts, one which has been done and one which is to come. It’s all about showcasing the fantastic things that people with disability are doing in their own lives and the contributions their making to our community, whether that’s socially, culturally, though work or what have you. It’s a chance for us to, kind of, bridge the disconnect between the extraordinary abilities that people have, you know, the ways which they can contribute, which many people already are doing and some people are not because of stereotypes, because of barriers. So this is a way of just kind of adding to the conversation and saying look what’s possible! And you know to employers, you’re missing out if you’re not doing this.

**Michelle Stanley:** Why is it so important, do you think, to be sharing these stories of the success stories of where people have found meaningful employment and it’s been successful for them and their employer?

**Liz Dutton:** I think it’s important to show employers how little work you need to do to employ a person with a disability and the immense return you can get on that small investment. To be able to identify people’s talents, rather than to focus on what they can’t do.

**Michelle Stanley:** Liz what has been your experience?

**Liz Dutton:** I’ve found that when I was applying for jobs that I wouldn’t even get a call back. I found that even though I had all the experience and I’d like to say it’s not because I’m not able to do the work. Before my accident I pretty much got any job I applied for, but then I found it impossible to get employers to engage.

**Michelle Stanley:** What do you think holds the employers back?

**Liz Dutton:** I think it really, it’s just that they don’t know. They think that it is too hard or, you know, it’s the stereotype, or the inner dialogue they may have because they just don’t have any interaction with people with disability. So we’re hoping The Lives We Lead can just perhaps give an insight and allow people to see what’s possible with a little bit of imagination and a bit of tweaking.

**Geraldine Mellet:** Yeah we want to make this useful. We’re not celebrating the fact that people have jobs, not at all, because those people deserve those jobs, they’re great at those jobs, they bring things to those jobs. What we want to show, exactly as Liz has said, is how it came about, what was the difference, was it an attitude of an employer, or was it some support that the person was able to access. So we want people to sit up and take notice and go ‘Oh, that is doable, yeah we can do that and look at the benefits it can bring.’

**Michelle Stanley:** What kind of difference does having this kind of work make for someone with a disability?

**Liz Dutton:** Having employment and contributing to your community brings about a sense of being valued, being important, it helps ease the economic disadvantage that many people with disabilities face. I mean it really is that purpose and meaning that improves your mental health, your entire outlook.

**Geraldine:** I think there’s, often what I’ve heard a other disability advocates talk about is the tyranny of low expectations. I know Liz has said to me before that sitting on the train someone will say ‘Where are you off to?’ and she’ll say ‘Oh to work’ and they’ll go ‘Ohh do you work?’ and the assumption you know. It’s there all the time, yet Liz works with us at WA’s Individualised Services and her superpower, there are many, but one of her superpowers is her lived experience and she brings that to the peer support group that she coordinates. Nobody else without her experience can do that. And that’s different across different jobs I know, but there’s always a superpower, there’s always something someone can bring, but it’s just not visible some of the time.

We want to show the variety, we want to show stories that people haven’t seen before. So I think there are a lot of stories around and we will still do these stories, believe me, about people who have been able bodied, like Liz, you know who have acquired their disability, but equally we want to do those stories about people who were born with conditions or disabilities, might be an intellectual disability, because I think in showing the variety of the stories, age, gender, location, disability, that it covers off, you know, it’s this mosaic picture that shows the range. Some people think of disability, they think of wheelchair and it’s so much more than that and abilities go across the board. So that’s what we’re hoping for and why we want to talk to you today, to reach out to people in the Wheatbelt and the Midwest and say ‘We’d love to hear your stories, please get in contact with us.’

**Michelle Stanley:** If you would like to find out more about The Lives We Lead, you can call me here at the station and I can put you in touch with Geraldine and Liz. They’re looking for your stories of living with a disability and particularly in finding work. Thankyou so much Liz Dutton and Geraldine Mellet from WA’s Individualised Services, The Lives We Lead. Thanks for sharing your story.