**Speak Up-Kōrerotia**

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) at 75**

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**Speaker 1**

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Coming up next, conversations on human rights with Speak Up-Kōrerotia, here on Plains FM.

**Sally**

E ngā mana,

E ngā reo,

E ngā hau e whā

Tēnā koutou katoa

Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka, Speak Up-Kōrerotia.

Tune in as our guests ‘speak up’, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to speak up when the moment is right.

**Sarah**

Tuia ki runga,  
Tuia ki raro  
Tuia ki roto,  
Tuia ki waho  
Ka rongo te ao,  
Ka rongo te pō.

Haumi ē hui ē taiki ē.

**Sally**

Tēnā koe, Sarah. This is Speak Up-Kōrerotia, with Sally Carlton, your host. Te kaupapa o te rā, he “Neurodiversity in the workplace”; today, we're talking about “Neurodiversity in the workplace”. I'm really, really looking forward to the kōrero today. I think this is a hugely important topic and one which deserves a bit of airtime – and I think we'll probably come to the conclusion that we are hearing more and more about this topic, which is great. We have four guests. You all bring different lenses to this topic, which is exciting. It would be wonderful to hear a little bit from each of you about your background and what it is that you're going to be contributing today. Sarah, you did our karakia, so let's start with you, please.

**Sarah**

Awesome. Kia ora, koutou. So I’m Sarah, I am the head of capabilities at Diversity Works New Zealand. I've been working here for the last year. But before that, I was actually working with refugee whānau within the resettlement space, particularly supporting communities who receive whānau who have arrived here with the refugee experience. My masters was in human rights advocacy, but now I'm working in this diversity in the workplace space, and I bring that sort of lens to this mahi. I am neurodiverse: dyslexia and traits of ADHD and I'm on a continual learning journey as to what that means for me in the workplace. So that's probably the angle that I'll be contributing. But also that diversity in the workplace means. Kia ora.

**Sally**

Thanks so much. Who would like to go next?

**Rich**

Kia ora, te whānau.[*Mihi*]I'm Rich. I'm from Stoke in the UK originally, and I live in New Zealand, in Auckland with my partner Amanda who’s an ED doctor and a ministry advisor and our four children and they all have beautifully different brains, like me. And they're the reason that I do the work that I do, which is neuroinclusion and education.

**Sally**

And what can you tell us about Brain Badge, please?

**Rich**

Brain Badge is a project of the non-profit that I set up called The Observatory. And it's really, it's an educational business, but a different kind of educational business. So I, for most of my life, including most of my adult life, believe that I was an awful learner. I actually discovered that I was far from – I'm actually really pretty good at learning – it's just that we haven't really got learning environments yet in school or in businesses that actually enable me to thrive. And like I think of a business is literally a learning environment, right? Business is just a succession of problems that you need to learn how to solve. So I think we've got learning environments, that because we were they were built for a time when we were focussed on production, they emphasise a certain kind of cognition, recognise and value a certain kind of cognition, and support a certain kind of cognition. And, that's, that's from my lived experience.

So, my mission is to, like, make a neuro-inclusive society, right. That's a wicked problem that we're trying to solve. We don't believe that the traditional old model of learning, it's not very inclusive. Anyway. It doesn't work for me and a lot of people I know who were very much like me and its current way of learning is like a solo sport, right? It's hierarchical, it's competitive, and that's not how we're going to solve a wicked societal problem; we need a collaborative approach to learning. And, yeah, that's that's what we do; we're neurodivergent education specialists. And my friend Katrina, who I work with on it, says that I should actually mention “international award-winning” education specialists. So we, we really understand education and learning and what it means to get engaged emotionally, engagement with learning. And we get that, through looking at neuro inclusion and work because we found it's something that matters to a hell of a lot of people. So that's who we are and what we do.

**Sally**

That's so cool, and I'm sure we'll hear more about that as we go through today. Prudence, how about we hear from you next?

**Prudence**

[*Mihi*] I’m Prudence, I currently live in Christchurch, and I'm the Disability Rights Commissioner for the Kāhui Tika Tangata, the Human Rights Commission. And that role, I'm tasked with protecting and promoting the rights of disabled people and that includes with access to services to assert their rights and participate fully in society. I do that through, to name a few things, advocacy, influence and policy. The Commission as a whole, but also me in my role, have a monitoring and reporting role. And of course, plenty of collaboration.

So the Human Rights Commission was established through the Human Rights Act, and my role was actually, in legislation, to say that there will be a disability rights commissioner to promote and protect the rights of disabled people. As the commissioner, we provide that information and if needed, frame the action for human rights and discrimination cases that are covered by the Human Rights Act. So as someone who lives with the effects of acquired brain injuries, I do consider myself neurodivergent. And I'm really pleased to be part of this conversation today, because eradicating discrimination and employment against people who are neurodiverse in the wider community of disabled people is both relevant to my role, as Disability Rights Commissioner, the work of the Commission, and to me personally. Kia ora.

**Sally** Kia ora. And our final guest, we've got Jacqui.

**Jacqui** Kia ora. Ko Jacqui tōku ingoa. Tāku mahi Dyspraxia Support Group Aotearoa. , māku tamariki, tāku rangatahi, tāku whānau. Kia ora My name is Jackie and I work for the Dyspraxia Support Group of New Zealand, the CEO and the National Field worker. We work with anyone that requires support around developmental dyspraxia – otherwise known as developmental coordination disorder - and so that can be right through from preschoolers through to adults. And we work with teaching staff, with tertiary educators and with employers, as well as primary and high school teachers.

**Sally**

Thanks so much, Jacqui. Sso we've already had a sense, just in these intros, about how very diverse neurodiversity is but it would be great, just as we get into our kōrero today, to think about what do we mean when we're talking about neurodiversity? Big question.

**Rich**

Do you want the traditional bog standard, magical pathologized version of what it is? We're broken and we need fixing. Or do you want the actual truth of what it actually is?

**Sarah**

Probably the second.

**Rich**

I think about cognition all the time. I mean, I've been really, really look at it. I went to work at a place that changed my life a few years ago, which was my lab and tech futures lab, and it was all about trying to change education and also trying to teach businesses how to be innovative, which for business means do agile and lean. And I look at how people think together in group context through the lens of innovation, right, and what I discovered was my kind of cognition – which has these labels associated with it, which aren't very empowering, you know, I've got deficit disorders and disabilities; I just experience the world in a different way – and it adds value in certain really complicated and, chaotic problem spaces. It just comes at the expense of me not being so good and strong in kind of day-to-day. I went to the doctor's with my 17-year-old today, and as soon as I walked in, they gave me a form to fill in and that it's just, like, horrible, you know. I've got a I've got a Masters, I'm going to do a PhD, but somebody gives me a form to fill and it just floors me in. So I do look a bit dysfunctional, if that's the way that you're going to imagine me. But I'm like, I've got cognitive strengths in other areas. And, I believe that cognitive diversity is a natural response to different complexities with problems within the environment. And that's my view of it. I understand why the medical profession look at is and the learning systems look at us like there's something wrong with us, but that's… I don't believe that at all.

**Sarah**

Just jump in there in terms of like that terminology around neurodiversity and how that sort of popped into our careers, in recent times. And I guess that's that strength-based language to talk exactly about what Rich's just spoken about as sort of another way to be able to, have that supported by the neurodiversity must have come out of neuroscience and, you know, and, and how we're now looking at how we can kind of, yeah, approach this conversation in a much more straight way. So it feels a bit crazy at the moment. But at the same time, it's great to be able to start the conversation from a power base rather than from a deficit base.

UP TO HERE

**Jacqui**

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Unfortunately we need to change the the assessment situation because, you know, parents that I talk to when they're going for an assessment, it's “OK. Think about your worst day with your child”. Because if you go in say “They’re, you know, be great at this, and we have really cool conversations about this”, and things that are great, you're not going to get an assessment. You're not going to get any support. And as a parent... So I have a child that is neurodivergent and yeah, looking at all of the things, it's a deficit of him, going through the school system is really disheartening. And it's really awful that you have to put that forward as “this is why I need support”. Because my child doesn't measure up to your standards. But then you get into the classroom and you want it to be strength-based but often that doesn't transfer from the report, the negative report that you get, to then actually transfer that into support that is strength based. And that's part of the job that I do, is I take that report and say, okay, let's change the wording. Where can we support this child where they are strong?

**Sally**

This might be a question that hasn't really got an answer, but do we have a sense of how many people in Aotearoa we might be talking about?

**Rich**

No. Go to stats NZ and Google it: there's literally no data whatsoever at all for New Zealand. It’s actually a massive gap. Yeah. And even when we have got data, right, it's inaccurate because we're just so crap at spotting it. In this year alone, four people who I’ve within the past have got in touch and gone, “Oh, guess what? I've just got my diagnosis”. And I'm like, “Yeah, no shit, Sherlock”. I know huge numbers of adults who, let's say, they think very similar ways to me, but they haven't got a clue that they’re neurodivergent. It's not like, “Whoa, I've got autism!” Is it? Like there's a meme on Facebook I saw that said, “It's nice to know you’re a usual zebra, not an unusual horse”, right? And that's probably the best thing I can say about getting the diagnosis: it explained why I felt really weird and unusual, but it's not good news. Like, you don't go round in it from the rooftops! … Sorry, I got an ADHD moment and forgot what I was talking about. You’ll find, talking to me on one of these like this, hilarious.

**Sarah**

For sure. But yeah, I totally get that. But it's interesting what you're saying too, Rich, about lots more adult now being diagnosed. And we're definitely noticing at Diversity Works that sort of prevalence of organisations coming to us and going, yeah, we've just had somebody who has, you know, or a few people who have just got a diagnosis. What do we have to do? And I'm sure, Rich, you’ll see this in your work and all of you will see it in your work… I always feel from my point of view, from my own experience, I got diagnosed when I was 11 around my dyslexia, but I'm 43 and I'm only just figuring out actually what that actually means when I turn up at work. Because I didn't have the language, I didn't… I wasn't… Nobody taught me about that. It was just like, oh, it's reading, it’s writing, you're shit at spelling, blah, blah, blah. I didn't understand anything in terms of how I showed up at work. So if somebody asked me, even when I first started here only a year ago – I've just been on this journey recently – about, you know, well, what can we do for you? And I'm like, blank. I don't know, you know, let me get back to you about that. So yeah, that's diagnosing but then actually, like, being able to learn to articulate like what it is you need.

**Rich**

And could I just add there: I mean, this is the problem, right? If you're trying to learn how to be a neuroinclusive workplace, one of the challenges is, if you say, like, what accommodations do you want? Well, in actual fact, it's really hard to say because we've never had any. And so some people quite simply don't know. It's a learning journey for everybody, right? And it's kind of like tried and tested and stuff. Where I used to work was amazing. They would really interested in how could they support me to do a better job. And they changed my life, transformed my life, just having that. But quite often they'd ask me things and I'd feel so pressured to answer, I'd just throw something out there and then, like, whatever I'd suggested was absolutely crap and definitely not working. And then I kind of got to go, like, made me feel doubly stupid, right? Having to kind of go back again and go, “Yeah, you know I said I needed this? Actually, I don’t…”

So it's very complex. You're trying to take, a population of people who the world's just not built to recognise, acknowledge or understand us at all. It's really quite a traumatic experience. I love how my brain works and thinks. What I don't like is the trauma that's been caused to me by going through learning systems and work systems that have really almost bent me and broken me. I'm optimised for that system, right? I'm a white privileged male, so I should have gone into that system and just done amazing. And just because I think differently, it churned me up and spat me out and damaged me. And all of my challenges and issues that I face in the workplace and at home are due to the trauma that's caused, not the actual, not the fact I've got a brain that experiences the world differently. That's the bit I'm learning to love.

**Sarah**

That resonates so deeply. Yeah.

**Jacqui**

Particularly with our tamariki, that is one thing that I really talk to the parents about is explaining to them that their brain does work differently so that they understand that they have dyspraxia and they’re, you know, working at how the brain works, what they need to be successful and how to ask for it. Because a lot of the time I'll go into a workplace and I'll say to the person, well, how does dyspraxia affect you? And they really don't know. And some of that's your experience here where you were just told this is what you've got and you know, scaffolding and things are put in place, but there's no explanation of what's being done to support you and why – no reflection on does this actually work for you? So people come out of the education system without that innate knowledge about what it means for them, what they need to be successful, and how to actually ask for that in a workplace. And then because you can't do that in the first job, you may not keep that first job, so then the compounding of, as Rich says, getting chewed up and spat out by the system.

So that's something that we really encourage parents to do, is actually have these conversations with the children. It's not scary. It's not a bad thing. And a lot of parents kind of look at a label, “I don't want my child to be labelled”. But it's like, but your child already knows that they’re different to the peers. It's not a surprise for them that they have this, but by actually giving them the language to understand themselves, they can go out into the world, you know, much more secure in themselves, their self-esteem and where your abilities lie, rather than trying to keep it hush hush and we don't want anyone to know that you're on the spectrum and try and fit in to that typically developing world because they just it just doesn't work that real self-empowerment as a massive thing. And then that that just helps and all facets of your life.

**Rich**

It's so hard through, right, because all the language around it's deficit language. Right? *Dys*praxia. You look at the etymology of the word *dis*, all the language around, it's negative. It's basically because what happens is you put people like us into a system that, like, it was never designed for us to be able to go into and thrive at all. It's like it's cognitively hostile.

How does that manifest? When I was at school – psychology says these days they call it oppositional defiance disorder, right – and it's because you're just so broken by the system. And like if you are to just give in, will fight back and consequences of that. For me, when I was a kid, I went to a school where you just got hit, you know, the corporal punishment was a big thing and like, you just got belted. They tried to beat the defiance of you, but like, you couldn't even stop it because it's such a wrong system and it's, you know, it's we don't have the beatings anymore, but the environment hasn't really changed at all. I failed school. If I went back to any secondary school anywhere in New Zealand, I would fail again.

And that's no reflection on the people who work in those systems. The fault lies in the deep, structural, foundational philosophy of the whole system. It's wrong and it's flawed – and that's my mahi, that's what I do. I've spent my life like in it, working in it, trying to change it, understanding it. I'm developing a sustainable way to try and change that because, in all honesty, as well – this is not to denigrate anybody – I don't believe that the politicians are capable of changing things because it's the pendulum swings one way and then it swings the other. Funding's based on fair weather, right? It can come and it can go. That's why, when we looked at how do we begin solving this problem, we went, well, who's got money and who's got a need? It's businesses. And I know from the work that I was doing for the past few years, there is a direct link between cognitive diversity and our ability to solve different kinds of problems. And businesses will pay money to understand how to optimise that because it increases their bottom line. And that's how are we looking to do a sustainable education change that can't be subject to political whims or philosophical whims or whatever. We get to do it our way for our community without having to make compromises. It's so important. My kids are going through a school system that's telling them the same things that that system told me when I went through. That's 40 years later. And that's actually… you know, I understand why it is, but it makes me kind of cross and angry as a parent. It's tough to see my kids experiencing the same thing that I experienced. And that's… I mean, I love it, you know, we weren't having these conversations two years ago, but there's still a lot of work to do, right? I think neuroinclusion is the last frontier of diversity and inclusion.

**Prudence**

From my point of view, you know, disability in general is. And, you know, actually the positive thing that I see is that there is more conversation around neurodivergence in the last couple of years. I think that it's probably got a long way to go so far as like the system response that you've all talked about, and, you know, workplaces figuring out actually how to get the most out of people, not in the traditional sense of productivity, but actually maximising those abilities that people have. I think that's why it's really good for businesses and organisations are wanting to know more. We've certainly, at the [Human Rights] Commission been approached more frequently by employers and employment agencies about connecting with people who are neurodivergent or, organisations supporting them.

I think the maturity of the awareness, I would like to see that it considers, you know, the whole umbrella of neurodivergence. In the past. I've been involved in some work or some conversations where neurodivergence or neurodiversity is spoken about or written about but it's taken a while to drill down a bit into actually what they're talking about. Because sometimes they're using that word, for example, only to talk about autism – which needs to be talked about, but we need to consider the whole umbrella of neurodivergence and indeed disability because, you know, a lot of people also, of course, have multiple different experiences.

**Rich**

One of the problems we're talking about: neuro*divergence*, you've got you still othering, right? You still going? We've got these two things like neurotypical, neurodivergent and it's the wrong way of looking at it. We should talk about cognitive diversity, not neurodiversity. We should talk about neuroinclusion for the complete system as cognitive diversity, so a complete range of human thinking. I think it's a beautiful thing. I believe it's nature's greatest gift to us, right, how we think as people.

And that's another thing Mind Lab was about, right? It wasn't about teaching kids to program robots; it was really about the power of, like, a different kind of learning methodology where people can solve problems. It's all due to our cognitive diversity. That's why making changes in work and in education is so important. I mean, we're about solving problems on the planet, right? And I'm like, well, you are looking for somebody to blame. It's not politics or anything; it's literally down to our learning system. We've only really learned to solve one kind of problem and we, we, we need to learn how to cope with complex problems and understand the value of cognitive diversity and solving those problems.

**Sarah**

And just thinking of the DEI and the cultural lens as well, and intersectionality when we're talking about this as well, because first of all, there's a certain amount of privilege even being able to have the kōrero around the nuances of this terminology, right? And then I sort of think about where we are, in terms of understanding Māori and what perspectives come through from different cultural frameworks around how we show up and solve problems. There are lots of little gifts within our ecosystem that actually are already in place and working with for a range of cognitive abilities. You know, I think it's an interesting thing for us to also always try to keep in mind as well, and how some of this language can really empower all of us collectively. And we can kind of go on a journey so that we can articulate ourselves. But then those systems that are in place, like you're talking about, right? You know, like, they've been set up for neurotypical, productivity-driven and Industrial Revolution-style stuff and blah, blah, blah and that whole stack of thing. Whereas there are actually frameworks of systems and oh, that's… Yeah, that's the usual thing.

**Rich**

Yeah. Do you know what one of the biggest joys for me has been since, like… I've worked in education in New Zealand for 20 years, right? The first ten years while I was in schools – didn't really know anything about kaupapa Māori, indigenous values or knowledge systems – and yeah, I mean, that's a beautiful, deep well of knowledge, right? And the great thing is, like you say, we've already got a lot of this stuff. It's, it's here. We don't need to reinvent anything. It's like a neuroinclusive society, it's just basically human-centred values. So people-centric mindset that we need. Unfortunately, school was designed to treat people like units of production at a real deep structural level. It hasn't changed. And you put in people into it, into an industrial system, and the results are, I believe it traumatises everybody who goes through that and the ones who experience the most trauma, are the ones who are the most different from who it was designed for. So if you're culturally different, anybody who's not a white Pākehā male, you’re kind of disenfranchised right from the start. And then if you add in cognition onto that as well – it disenfranchises huge numbers of people.

**Sarah**

So the context of what we're working in when we're having this conversation here today, like, you know, we're working in this context that is set up the way it is. And now we've got all this new kōrero and then sometimes I worry with the neurodiversity it's like – and being dyslexic – oh well, that's the easy one. Okay, so we’ll just deal with all the dyslexics because we can get a reader or, you know, we can use all of this technology and dyslexics can think big and okay, cool. But then hold on a second. Just like you saying, Prudence, you know, like there's so many ways that neurodiversity shows up and then the compounding factors of other disabilities on top of that and then suddenly all of this is starting to get missed again. It seems to be a little bit of a pecking order, in a way. And everybody's like, well, what's the easy one? And so sometimes that worries me… Well, it doesn’t worry me but it's something that I'm thinking a lot about when I'm thinking about this at the moment. Yeah.

**Prudence**

You were all talking before about our identity journeys, but our, our journeys, with how our brains work as well and, you know, different levels of awareness around what that means or what we need because of that. That speaks to me to the importance of workplaces creating a place that can really embrace what skills people bring or who they are, what they're bringing to work, like how that presenting it work and maximise that.

We think about the social model experience of disability: it's society that's creating the barriers. So if we can have organisations that are open to how work looks, even if people don't know themselves, I suppose what support they might need and everything, but recognising the real strengths that people bring and maximising that, I'm sure actually not in the traditional sense of productivity perhaps, but I think and in terms of actually organisations that do really well at what they do, and producing whatever it is that they produce, I'm sure actually that that would be really quite successful. I think sometimes people or organisations really, really complicate this stuff.

Having run an organisation previously that mainly employed disabled people of a number of different experiences and certainly a number of people who would be considered neurodivergent within that, there was a different way of us all working and functioning as an organisation and everything, but actually, like, it’s not that hard. So I think, you know, often people get really wound up about how difficult things are, when, as you say, it's it's kind of human-centred stuff. If we focus on the humans that are in the workplace, then it's not that hard, a lot of the time.

**Jacqui**

When you're talking about that high productivity and people working quickly, often for someone with dyspraxia, that just isn't part of their skill set. But it's really interesting: a couple of workplaces I’ve been in recently when I've talked about the employees’ processing time where the workplace has classes that as ‘idle time’ because the person hasn't started doing what they've been instructed to do and I say, no, no, that's not idle time, that’s processing time. That processing delay, and they need to work through that before they start. And for the employer, it's a complete revelation. They go, “Oh” and it puts it in a completely different context. It's not idle time; it's processing time.

And if you allow that person to have that processing time when they come to the task, they're actually going to be able to manage it just as well as their typically developed workmates. But you've got to give them that processing time first. You know, even really small things like that age can make a huge difference. There's also the thing of, as you say, kind of that blanket “We have to be inclusive so we're going to put on all of these things that are inclusive” but you haven't actually asked the person who it affects, “Is this relevant to you and to your experience? Is this going to be helpful?” And the other thing, as well as a lot of businesses, whilst they may be internally doing well, things like the website, just doesn’t work for their neurodivergent customer.

**Rich**

There's not a single interface anywhere in the world that's designed for somebody like me. Nothing. Websites, forms, posters in doctor's offices, everything. It's like they’re so biased in the design principles that it’s ridiculous. It's like I get stumped by a simple form, right? Because the personal asking a question on the form gives you space to answer and I'm sure in their head they're thinking, “Well, there's probably three or four responses to that question”; in my head, there's about a thousand! And literally there's no help on the website, no help on the form for like, which one of my thousand possibilities I should fill in and this thing. And when I do actually do the thing I hate most, which is ring up and speak to somebody they really can't help, other than reading out what's actually on the form of the website and treat me like I'm an idiot.

We've just looked at the world from one perspective for a long time, and it's very, very… it makes you feel stupid. I've spent all my, almost all my adult life thinking I was stupid, and that's the impact of it. I don't know, I've got a Master's. I wrote my Master's thesis in a day: talk about productivity, right? So *agile* is a big thing in business, right? And in agile business there’s this thing called ‘scrum’. And when you tracking scrum, you're tracking a whole team of jobs to do and you have this thing called a burn rate. And it's supposed to be a graph that tracks everybody's progress, right? And it's a…

I don't work like that. So the first time I was ever put on a Kanban… like, my boss came after three weeks and was like, is everything all right, Rich?. And I'm like, yeah, everything's fine. And she pulls up my Trello board and she's like, you've not moved anything across to “To do”, “Doing”, “Done”. And I was like, there's a month left. I was like, I literally won't move anything across till the Friday morning that it's due in. And then I'll be up at 3:00 in the morning and I'll finish it all then. And it will be amazing, like everything I always do is.

And so it's we've got all of these like weird views of what progress is and how it works and what productivity is and how it works. Like you were saying earlier, I loved what you were saying earlier on because for me, I mean, also I've got pathological demand avoidance, right? because I hate writing. So I will put off writing until the last possible minute. But it's like I do what I said there and I think, you know, mull it over and like at the end, under a bit of pressure, it all comes out and it's a bit like magic. But it's not a linear, linear thing, you know. If you ran an organisation that thinks about productivity in that way and is actively doing bringing in agile practices that totally support that myth, then you look you just look dysfunctional. And it's, you know, that's even more pressure on people than like, oh, then you just feel like you should be doing shit just to move your cards, right?

**Sarah**

Oh, yeah. Like, I mean, it can be as simple as just reframing, you know, just reframing what you're already doing. Somebody else has probably told the person that that's how we do it. Yeah. So yeah, no, don't worry, we can do it that way as long as it gets done. Because at the end of the day, you need to get it done. Yeah. And does the slight shift in the language or a slight shift in understanding, and it doesn't have to be like a massive thing.

**Rich**

All the accommodations I need to thrive are actually pretty small and reasonable, right? Yeah. Yeah, that's it's just taken me quite a long time to actually really figure out what they are. I'm actually… One thing that I'm amazing at no:. I could walk into any organisation, look at what they do and tell them exactly where my value begins and where it ends, and what I need from them to best support me toward the best value that I can. But that's taken me… I got my diagnosis ten years ago and constantly thinking about it, being involved in ineffective environments in that time as well, and it's taken me that long to get there.

**Sarah**

Yeah. One of the things that is resonating, definitely, and that I think about a lot, especially coming from the refugee sector and understanding trauma-informed care and how we show up in a trauma-informed way and with within all of this inclusion stuff, coming with that lens that people actually come to these things with trauma, right? Because society hasn't been set up for them because they've had this particular experience and this big deep trauma and this little trauma – and we don't have to be scared of the word because we all kind of like, don't bring that into, you know, that psychology – well, I'm sorry that we've all got wrong on that. We've all got some of a different label.

And if you are looking to support someone who has just got a neurodiversity diagnosis, and what you were saying to Rich, I've experienced that so much. Like I didn't get to university till I was 30, I was breastfeeding my third baby by the time I managed to get there, and suddenly I get a first class honours and I didn't get, you know, and I didn't know how the hell that happened, you know, I had no idea. And only now I'm 40, I'm getting my confidence. Yeah, I'm 43 going into my middle age. I'm bloody half that way back. And my daughter is part of it now and 11 years old and the self-esteem thing that you're talking about is absolutely key. And so now if you speak to the beautiful young people in this world, thank God for them, they have a lot more confidence about thinking about this, we can learn so much – but if you're a middle-aged person who's struggling with this at work and just finding this out, you've got a whole 30 years or 20 years of of not fitting into a system and thinking this stupid and all of that. I had all of this type of thing where it's like, totally, totally amazing, all of that. And the amount of, like, therapy I've had to bloody pay for to get out of it.

**Rich**

And I'm like, you know, I didn't qualify for ACC because of that because like, the traumatic experiences that happened to me happened abroad, right? So, like, I'm not able to add as much value as I possibly can back into New Zealand in the workplace because like ACC, whilst it acknowledges and supports trauma victims, it's still like ringfenced. I can't access that. I'm lucky I can work, I can pay for it, right? But like how many other people out there like me, you've had all of these experiences who would just, you know…

**Sarah**

Deal with it?

**Rich**

Like. traumatised people don't add value anywhere in the workplace, at home, ...

**Sarah**

How do we create work environments that can support people, understanding that there might be some trauma? You know, I don't know whether that's money towards coaching, whether that's money towards understanding, all of that.

**Rich**

I don't agree with a lot of stuff that the UK does, right? But I saw something on LinkedIn where you can apply for up to £60,000 of like coaching and support. If you’re diagnosed with ADHD or autism or dyslexia as an adult in the UK. And it's like, that puts New Zealand at the back of the queue in terms of what it does for support when you're an adult. When I got my diagnosis, what was available to me? Nothing. Tumbleweed. That was ten years ago. What's available today? Nothing.

**Sarah**

You’ve got to pay for it. But then the intersectionality these comes in and then we've got to look at our power and privilege wheel there and fully understand then what is happening for so many people who will never be able to access that, and then their workplace is not able to understand that situation.

**Rich**

So, you know, one statistic that I'd be really, really interested in really understanding what it is, the percentage of neurodivergent people who are caught up in the justice system. Yeah, I would love to know what that statistic is because I bet it's obscenely high. I bet if we actually got a number on it, it would be an embarrassment; I think it would be a societal embarrassment if we actually got that because it's… You know, I'm lucky I didn't end up in that system. A hell of a lot of my friends who now, when I reflect back on my life, they were all neurodivergent, they did. When you don't fit in these boxes that we've made for people to fit into, no matter what the reason is, whether it's cognition, cultural diversity, gender diversity, it causes damage. And one of the upshot of that damage is you're much more likely to end up in the justice system. And then the justice system, it's like the school prison conveyor belt. We built it, it's working really well, and we've done a really good job of it.

But now we need I think it's time to have honest conversations about this. Sometimes people, like, listen to what I say and say, “Oh, you know, schools aren't like that. Educators aren't like that”. Educators aren't. The people who work in that system are my heroes. I love educators, but we need to really, really look at what the impacts of these systems that we've yeah, we've had them for 300 years. Why, if we got such sacred bloody cows about what school should look like, surely by now we should have liked schools should have changed, the world changed, and we're reaping the rewards of that as a society.

**Sarah** And what I've noticed as well is that it changes, but only for the people who can pay for the fancy schooling.

**Rich**

My parents sent me to a private school to lift us out of poverty, right, because nobody in my family had been to uni. They believed in that. Did it work? Did it fuck. I just went to school every day and got hit. Private school, yeah, if you can afford to and you get a better experience, it's amazing, but like, acknowledge the bloody privilege that I'm so lucky. Why am I not in prison or dead? I had that privilege from my parents that a lot of my friends didn't. And the upshot of that is they are they went to prison for most of their adult life or they are actually dead, you know.

So the consequences of using these systems that we've had for so long, we we need to get better at solving them. And we need to understand that it's human-centred designs at the heart of it, right? Really taking the time to build safety, to build trust, to ask good questions and then to have a proper, research-informed, academically robust innovation process for doing things to change it, not based on political dogma or anything like that, just basically human-centred design. We’ve figured out how to do that, figured out how to design really good things for people, we just haven't actually applied all of those processes and tools and systems to the experience of school and the experience of work. There's nothing to find out. We don't have to invent anything to change it. It's already done. It's there. We just have to learn how to use these tools and systems and apply them. My partner calls me a radical optimist, right? because it's like the world is a bit shit, but I'm like, I don't care, it's better. Yeah. Because, like, fucking we've got human cognition and we can fix anything. We just need to look at a systems and begin changing them a little bit so that they work better for more people. Thirty percent of people globally leave our education system with a degree or equivalent, right? Well, that means as we literally optimise learning for 30 percent of the population, that that's really a bit crap, you know. I mean, like, let's just let's maybe try to 50 percent in the next couple of years, maybe that'll be a big improvement.

**Sally**

This has been amazing. I haven't asked any questions at all! I'm just mindful of time, so let's get on to the part where we just wrap it up, if you've got any final thoughts?

**Prudence**

Yeah, just listening to a lot of the kōrero, there’s a number of things and I'm not sure that I can keep track of them all at the pace of the conversation. But, I think, you know, you talk about issues around justice and certainly, you know, there is some research that I've seen around brain injury in the justice system. You know, no doubt many of those people are functioning in ways that are considered neurodivergent,

And then a lot of the talk relates, as well, I think to access to supports, inappropriate support and so that is a priority area that I'm working on at the moment. Listening to all that I hear from community and making a plan for, you know, how I might be able to use the tool of this role to influence some of those systems and everything. It's a big job, as we all know, because we're all working on different parts. But, yeah, I hope to be able to influence some of that in this role. And just thank you all for your role today and, and to be part of the conversation. We could go on forever, I know, but we are all doing so much towards that greater cause. And these conversations are great because it's just kind of head on or we just talk to ourselves about it, if we don't have these conversations, and these public spaces, and offer the opportunity to others who don't understand as much as we do to engage in the conversation. And, of course, just for me to end on, of course, you know, from a rights-based perspective, people have the right to work and the right to the supports that they need to function and to access things on an equal basis with others. So kia ora.

**Sally**

Thanks so much, Prudence. Jacqui or Sarah or Rich, you want a final word?

**Rich**

I said more than enough, sorry.

**Sally**

OK that’s great.Jacqui or Sarah, then?

**Jacqui**

Thank you so much for the opportunity today, it's been a really interesting kōrero for me. I would really like to see people treated as individuals, not as their label, because for us, people with dyspraxia, there is no support at all yet we represent more of the population than have a diagnosis of ASD or ADHD. And often, you know, some of the people that I work with, their functioning on a day-to-day basis, they need more support than other people that I know that have ASD that because they have the the label, that attracts the funding. You know, people are getting support and other people who are struggling more are getting no support. So I think the equitable funding, looking at what people actually need, regardless of what their label. And because as well, particularly for adults, again, it comes down to that financial ability to afford an assessment and diagnosis that, you know, a lot of people are at these struggling because they don't have that, like they can't access any support at all. Yeah. So I would really like to see some of those barriers removed for people. But it's been a really, really interesting afternoon and really lovely to hear those different points of view from, from Richard, Prudence and Sarah. So thank you very much for the opportunity. Kia ora.

**Sally**

And Sarah, we'll leave you with the final word and would you like to wrap up with a karakia?

**Sarah**

Yeah, yeah, just tautoko everything that has been said and, it's wonderful – like you said, Prudence – it's just so great to actually have this conversation outside of our bubble. Because all of us are working different touch points of the bigger, the wider issues, which is, you know, making sure that we create these inclusive societies and these spaces that we can all bring, you know, bring – not ourselves because we can choose what we bring to our… I'm not up to that – but it's just we can, you know, show up and and reach our potential and therefore build our self esteem in a workplace. Because at the end of the day, we've all got to make some money and we all gotta do what, you know, we've to function in this world.

So, it’s just beautiful. I guess the sort of take home for me is I want to have more conversations with diverse, like, cultural backgrounds and just noticed that all of us here probably whakapapa reasonably similarly, I'd love to bring more of that in. And I feel that there's a beginning and out and it's just ticking in my head, I'd love to have understanding of different perspectives of this kōrero. But at the end of the day, we all are working in the society in Aotearoa in the system that we all have to work in the system. So that's what I've sort of linked with. And also the, the trauma, and how we, mental health, I'm percolating those thoughts as I leave this kōrero today. But wonderful to meet you all and thanks so much for organising this space, Sally, for the kōrero.

Do we just want to finish with karakia, settling the energy. [*Karakia whakamutunga*]

**SONG Lagy Gaga, ‘Born this way’**