**Interview with Andrew Woodbury and Liz Wright**

Liz

This is a Women with Disabilities Victoria podcast.

We acknowledge that these podcasts were recorded on the traditional lands of the First Nations Peoples of this country. We acknowledge their Elders, past, present, and emerging. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded, and that this is, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

From the Outskirts is a series of podcasts featuring women with disabilities who live and work in regional Victoria.

I’m Liz Wright, a disability activist and advocate. I’m also the Manager of Community Inclusion and Women’s Empowerment at Women with Disabilities Victoria.

All the interviews were recorded in each person’s home or workplace, so from time to time there is unexpected background noise.

Andrea Woodbury is a musician and disability activist. She is passionate about ensuring the voices of women with disability are both heard and respected.

Andrea

My name’s Andrea. I’m on Wurundjeri land on the Kulin Nation.

Liz

How are you, Andrea?

Andrea

Good, thank you, Liz.

Liz

Andrea, how long have you lived out here?

Andrea

Probably close to ten years.

Liz

What prompted the move to come and live in Ringwood and where did you come from?

Andrea

I've always pretty much lived in the area most of my life. I actually moved out to go to university when I was 17, then I got sick again…and then I got sick, I got sick when I was almost 30.

Liz

What did you get sick with?

Andrea

Encephalitis.

Liz

For those who might be listening, who don't know what encephalitis is, are you able to explain?

Andrea

Yes. It's when the skin that sort of… the membrane that surrounds the brain gets inflamed. The people that get it have different experiences cause it's a brain thing. I am lucky I don’t get seizures. It I have a friend who has encephalitis, and she gets multiple seizures every single day, up to 300 seizures.

Liz

God.

Andrea

I am seizure free thank goodness, but I am unable to read properly because it affected…it put pressure on the area of my brain that helps my brain interpret letters and words.

So, I can read, but the way my brain processes things, you might say the word alligator and I might see the o r at the end, and the a, double l at the beginning, and I’ll remember it was alligator because I could read before I got sick, but yeah, it’s touch and go.

If I recognise a word, I can read it easier than if I don’t recognise it. But many words are hard to interpret sometimes.

Liz

So are you a person that uses audio as your main means of taking in communications.

Andrea

Pretty much, yes.

Liz

So, are you an audiobook reader?

Andrea

No not anymore, I don’t have time.

Liz

You don’t have time…what do you do with your time Andrea?

Andrea

I coordinate a band.

Liz

Oh, what's the band called?

Andrea

Ad Hoc Rock.

Liz

Tell us a bit about that.

Andrea

Ad Hoc Rock is a band for people who love music and live with disability. We have a couple of autistics, we have a blind me, we have a self-diagnosed Asperger’s, and he also has an ABI too.

We recently got on board an off-site drummer, cause he will learn our songs and when we need him he’ll come and play for us.

Liz

Can you say that again, who’s the drummer?

Andrea

He’s also another autistic.

Liz

OK, yeah.

Andrea

He works when we practice, he’ll learn the songs off-site. And when we're ready for him, when we need him, he’ll just fit in with us and come help us out.

Liz

How long's the band been together?

Andrea

I've been with the band for well over ten years now.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

It used to be called Winston’s Black Dog after Winston Churchill.

Liz

Oh, so Winston's black dog.

Andrea

Yeah cause…

Liz

….of depression?

Andrea

It was initially a mental health band. It used to run out of EACH, at Greenwood Avenue…so it was initially a mental health band, then people with other disabilities joined the band, such as myself, so we changed it to Ad Hoc Rock.

Liz

Are you part of the disability band scene? Do you know other bands like the Bipolar Bears and…?

Andrea

I’ve seen the Bipolar Bears perform and they are so loud…

Liz

They are loud (laughter)

Andrea

Because I used to be part of a thing called Stage Club, that’s how I got involved in Ad Hoc Rock. There used to be this thing called Stage Club that happened a couple of times a month, at Greenwood Avenue, EACH, for people that…a jumping off sort of thing for either bands that were trying to get recognised or acts that were trying to get recognised. We had poets, we had dancers troupes, we even had a band from Perth one time come along, they were in the area and thought they’d come and perform with us.

Liz

Wow.

Andrea

At Stage Club…

Andrea

So, I used to be on the door at Stage Club, and then one time, the person…the staff member who organised Stage Club, said: Andrea, and I said: Yes. Would you like to come and practice with the band, and be part of the band, so that’s how I became part of what was then, Winston’s Black Dog and is now Ad Hoc Rock.

Liz

Oh wow. And you're…you coordinate the band now?

Andrea

I coordinate the band now because basically the person that used to run it with me, he moved his other band’s practice to Friday’s, so he can’t come to this practice anyway.

And when COVID happened, we had to practice here cause, other than the fact that Lakewood…Lakewood got shut down, we actually had a big flood just before COVID, so we were practicing here anyway due to the fact that the place we played at…our practice place was…

Liz

Flooded…

Andrea

Unusable and mold and we couldn’t use it.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

So, we were practicing here anyway and then COVID hit, and we’ve been practicing here ever since which suits me because I now coordinate the band.

We jump on YouTube, and we play whatever we feel like, just a way of unwinding, and people getting their music choices out.

Because most members are younger than me, they’ve got very young tastes…

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

And we’ve also got another person who’s older than me, and he has older taste, it’s interesting.

Liz

Well, it's good to have an eclectic kind of song sheet to choose from really.

Andrea

Yes. Well, our actual songs is very eclectic. We’ve got stuff from back in the 60’s, Rolling Stones, we’ve got new stuff, like Green Day, bit of INXS. We also have…

Liz

So, it's mainly covers?

Andrea

Yeah. We've only written one song…I wrote one song. I have written a second one, but I’ve got to still workshop the lyrics because right now, it’s too long, cause I also do a project with W…WHE…

Liz

Is that Women's Health East?

Andrea

Margins to Mainstream.

Liz

Oh yes, tell us, what's Margins to Mainstream?

Andrea

Margins to Mainstream is a program to prevent violence against women with disabilities.

Liz

Yes.

Andrea

I’ve been involved with it for the past…oh… I think two and a half years. Definitely two years plus because we’ve done two of the sixteen days campaigns. During COVID we did lots of presentations online through COVID and last year we did some live presentations, which was lots of fun. Getting out to libraries and presenting our video, an d we did a presentation at Yarra Ranges as well.

Liz

So, the Council out here is Yarra Ranges and Knox…

Andrea

No, no, no. This is Maroondah where we are.

Liz

This Maroondah. OK.

Andrea.

This is Maroondah, yeah.

Liz

Well, that's good. So, your reach is pretty good.

Andrea

Well, Women’s Health East covers a lot and plus I’ve been involved with…when I did…I have a Community Development Diploma, and when I did my first placement, I went out to what is called the Outer Eastern Community Inclusion Alliance.

Liz

Yes, I know, OECIA.

Andrea

OECIA, yup. So, I’ve been to those meetings even before Amanda May was there…

Liz

And what are those meetings about?

Andrea

Anything anybody that has disability stuff to present, they can just present…I’ve advertised Ad Hoc Rock several times across the years, when we needed members.

Liz

So is it kind of like an information sharing network for people with disabilities so...

Andrea

It’s for organisations, so for example the last meeting, we, we, Women’s Health East and myself presented an update about Margins to Mainstream.

But there was also a NDIS coach, and they usually have updates about their grants operations, and they’ve also just started a clothes…like it’s for women who are returning to work, they collect all these office-y type clothes, and they sell them at low cost for women trying to get back to work.

Liz

Oh, that's great idea because it's expensive to get back into professional gear if you're living on a DSP trying to look for work.

Andrea

Yeah, it is.

Liz

So, you're pretty involved in the disability scene and involved in a lot of advocacy.

Andrea

Yup.

Liz

And so, you'd consider yourself a self-advocate as well as an advocate for others?

Andrea

I guess you could say that.

Liz

You know, before you said you're really busy and so you're involved with Margins to Mainstream, managing the band. You're also a health expert at WDV, is that correct.

Andrea

Yeah, yeah.

Liz

And how long have you been doing that?

Andrea

Since the very beginning at the Health Experts project, I think it was April, May the year before last I think, I’d have to check the time.

Liz

Yeah. What do the health experts do?

Andrea

I usually do the WDV as in Women with Disabilities presentations, which we sort of, we present, and we’ll sort of discuss things like advocacy and resources and our experiences as women with disability…

Liz

Within the health system?

Andrea

Yeah. Yup.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

For example…actually it’s on the video as well, I usually present…but I went to see an eye specialist. The eye specialist couldn’t figure out why I couldn’t read.

When he found out I sort of had an ABI, he…spoke….to….me….like…. this….

Liz

Like an idiot.

Andrea

Yes.

Liz

It's pretty common.

Andrea

Yep. It was… the fact that he made it to the health experts video…

I also was involved in a Mind the Gap project was a one off thing at LaTrobe Bundoora last year.

Liz

What’s Mind the Gap?

Andrea

Basically, it's about people with mobility challenges. They had some various things to try and make boarding trains easier.

Liz

OK.

Andrea

And I actually had a good think about it after going home…because in Melbourne we have such different gaps and different heights and different things as you’re boarding trains…it makes it very hard to make anything sort of consistent. So, my aim was I made a lot of points about that so…

Liz

It is pretty true that that there is inconsistencies in wherever you go and when you've got like a mobility issue or an eyesight issue, or a perception issue, it's really difficult to get on and off a train safely, yeah.

Andrea

I went to Box Hill station, and they had the new platforms that you’re supposed to just cross, I said: Na. You need to put the ramp out. I cannot board the train without assistance. And I had a full-on argument with them. Made the train late, which wasn’t my problem, but I said: I’m not getting on that train unless you put the ramp out.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

Or unless you physically help me on the train, cause I can’t do it. I just can’t do it. Cause as soon as… the wheels on my walker, the wheels are too…not big enough to sort of cover the gap…

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

So, you help me, or I can stand here all day making the train wait. And in my head, I was thinking I can stand here all day, and the train’s got to go, so I got my ramp in the end.

Liz

It's interesting the assumptions people make about a person with disabilities, abilities to do things. Like, just get on because you've got a walker, whereas it's not safe for you to do that.

Andrea

Yeah. Because as soon as you cross a gap, the wheels drop down.

Liz

Yeah. Yeah.

Andrea

If I hit a stone, I can fall backwards. I was actually…. I went to Lara as an adventure.

I went to Lara by train and taxi and the last bit was a taxi and I said: I need to go to this place. I gave the taxi the address – he was a local taxi driver. He drove me and he said, I can’t find it. Cause he accidentally parked in front of the placard saying what it was, you know the a-frame saying where he was, and you’ve got to go, and you’ve got to go up.

So, I went out and I walked up, and I thought I’m lost, so , I rang the place, and then actually the neighbour who actually found me on his property, on accident and he found me, but I’d hit a stone and fell back and split my head open. So, I was bleeding everywhere and the poor guy…I said: well, I got told by my taxi driver and he said the taxi driver told you wrong, you should have been back where you were initially, so he took me back and…yeah…

Liz

Do you think transport is an issue for most people with disabilities?

Andrea

Yes. It is easy if you have a scooter. But even like, for example, toilet doors, the bane of my existence cause I don’t have the balance to open or close them. Cause most disabled toilet doors are so damn heavy, I have to take someone with me to go… to go to the toilet most of the time.

(Music playing)

Liz

I just want to get back to you and your personal life. You've got a dog?

Andrea

Yes, a gorgeous dog.

Liz

Yeah. Tell us about Trouble.

Andrea

Trouble is beautiful.

(laughter)

Look, I’m biased. I can’t have children's, so Trouble’s my baby. She's eight years old.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

She's a Husky cross Shepherd. She sheds a lot, but she’s still adorable.

Liz

Doesn't matter, you can’t see all the hair anyway…I can’t see it…

(laughter)

Andrea

When she was a puppy, we sat with her through her first thunderstorms and her first fireworks and her first car trips. Now she sleeps through the thunderstorms, I wake up. She sleeps through fireworks, I wake up. She is just…awesome.

We came home once, and she had like a blue halo around her head and we just couldn’t stop laughing. It turns out she’d been in the garbage bin, which is just behind over the corner their…and she’d got the bin lid stuck on her head.

(laughter)

Andrea

And we were in hysterics. And we came in said: Trouble, you’ve made a mess!

(laughter)

Andrea

There was mess all over the floor so…we’ve got a photo of that.

Liz

You got a photo of that?

Andrea

Yes. And my best friend says: She’s looking up at you saying: It wasn’t me Mummy, it was you Mummy, it wasn’t me.

Liz

And she hasn't come out of the bedroom yet. I want her to come out.

Andrea

She's very shy.

Liz

Do you take her walking every day?

Andrea

I can't take her walking, but my support worker is lovely, and when the weather is good, she gets lots of walks. The other day I had to go out there, so my support worker, took her down to the dog park, and she loves it.

Liz

In this local area, is there a lot of amenity? Can you walk around here quite safely? Or do you drive?

Andrea

Physically I can, but its psychological you know cause of my balance problem. Anyway, it's….my brain, when I was…after I was sick, my mother would say to everybody who would listen, including me when I was young, I could hear her: Andrea has bad balance.

Andrea

And that thought has festered in my head, no matter what I do, I just can’t get rid of that thought.

Liz

You can’t shake it.

Andrea

Yeah. So, most of my balance problems are in my head.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

Psychological. I have strong legs. If I have something behind me, I can balance for a while. If I have nothing behind me when I’m standing, I get really panicky.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

In fact, I had a fall almost two weeks now at Boronia Leisure Works. There's a bump in the in the carpet because you can't see because it's carpet covering it, as you enter. But as I was leaving the other day. because I sorted of needed to turn around and navigate…, I needed…I was turning myself to be going straight up the slope, I was walking around to people, chatting, and cause I was walking around those people, I hit that bump, and I just went over.

I spent the night in Maroondah Hospital. Lots of fun. And there were a couple of horrible nurses that were totally… And I know this is because of COVID, but it doesn’t excuse saying to me…cause I said I had a T-Cross and I need to have a catheter, and as soon as I said T-Cross, and I need to have a catheter…

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

And eventually when I got one, I said: Look I need a script for an EA, script for antibiotics. And the nurse said to me: You asked for the catheter. And I thought: How dare you.

And then I had a doctor, as I was leaving, he said: Why do you have catheters? I said: One it’s none of your business, but for your information cause I was in hospital for 14 months when I was 20. I mean, they ask such stupid questions, cause they’re curious.

Liz

Yeah, but it's not respectful…

Andrea

No.

Liz

You know…you can…there's asking and asking.

Andrea

As a counsellor you get taught not to ask questions cause you’re curious.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

I think doctors need to learn the same thing.

Liz

Yeah. I mean, I think it's great you’re health expert, because you've had quite a lot of experience in hospital and understand…

Andrea

How to speak up for myself, yes….

Liz

Yeah. But also, how difficult it can be. I mean I think for a lot of people with disability, the questioning around how you live and what you need is irrelevant. People don't need to know. You know your body. You're the expert of your own disability.

Andrea

And the best thing to do if you’re unsure…ask me.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

I know myself better than anybody else.

Liz

Yeah True.

Andrea

You don't guess at me because I know better than you do sort of thing.

(Music playing)

Andrea

I'm also involved with an indigenous group called Yeng Gali. I've been involved with them for over a year now.

Liz

What sort of songs do you sing?

Andrea

We sing something in language. One of the things that Uncle Vin often tells us is that when you go to visit a neighbouring nation or a neighbouring area, you need to know the language, just as a courtesy. And often as an indigenous person you need to know at least three or four languages. And his favourite thing is, white people call us dumb, but we had to learn four languages…and white people call us dumb.

And we sing in the Tasmanian dialect, cause basically the Tasmania got mashed into one dialect. We sing in a language one of the songs is from Perth and a couple of songs have been translated into the native language of our Elders that we sing a song that Aunty Irene has translated a verse of the song into her native language. And it’s Down in the Kitchen and it has actions for the kids.

Liz

Oh, that’s fantastic.

Andrea

Down in the kitchen. And we also sing a lullaby song called Inanay, and I am not sure what language that is in.

Liz

Is that a Tiddas…used to sing Inanay?

Andrea

I think Tiddas used to sing it. It’s a lullaby they’ve been singing for generations.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

Inanay capuana Inanay (singing)…Yes, it’s beautiful. And we sing, Amazing Grace in language and Bura Fera is in language as well.

Liz

How did you get involved with this indigenous music group?

Andrea

It’s quite a funny story. My mother-in-law got asked to be their vocal coach. So, I worked with the powers that be, which is MMIGP, Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place. I said: Is it OK if I come along, my mother-in-law is going to be vocal coach there, is it OK if I come along to have a sing with everybody?

And after the first visit, I said: Is it OK if I come back again? And they said: Yes, the Elders would love you to come back whenever you want to.

So, I’ve been going back ever since. Yes, it’s been such an enjoyable thing. Learning language. Learning the meanings. But because of my slight speech impediment I have trouble pronouncing some of the indigenous language, but it’s just great fun.

Liz

So, you're pretty busy… like...

Andrea

So, Monday’s is Yeng Gali, and we Tuesday’s counselling and Wednesday I have support work, and work if I have WDV, Thursday is WHE, Friday is swimming and band.

Liz

Weekend for resting.

Andrea

Ah weekend I have support work, Saturday, and usually the family gets together on the weekend. Well Paul’s family, because my mother passed away and my dad is overseas.

Liz

Where does your father live?

Andrea

Malta. My family's all Maltese. My parents are Maltese, aunts and uncles Maltese. Only one uncle was Australian because my uncle got married over here. He met an Australian.

Liz

So, did your dad move back as he got older?

Andrea

Well see, my parents got divorced. And my dad married someone who came from Malta and my Mum married an Australian fella.

Liz

Wow. So, your dad moved back to Malta with his Maltese wife?

Andrea

Well, he comes here when he can, but he was blocked from coming because of COVID. Also, his wife doesn’t have the best health, and sometimes…he had to cut his trip short last year cause, Mum got sick – I call her Mum cause she’s my step mum. So, he had to go back early cause Mum was sick. She’d only just been cleared to fly again, and she got sick again, so she was pretty disappointed.

Liz

You mentioned mother-in-law. So, you've been married or are married?

Andrea

I am married, yes. My mother-in-law, she actually runs a choir course at Yeng Gali That's how Paul and I met. Cause I did a work placement for Community Development for my Swinburne course and Lakewood where Paul lives. So , one of the things we did was we sent around a questionnaire to sort of, as a community development thing to engage residents. We had our music therapy student working with Lakewood, to sort of engage the community, and one day I went to the office, and I called everyone in the building on the intercom system who’d mentioned they liked choirs and music, whatever, and got them to come down to choir practice.

And Paul came along and a while later because I forgot my music books at home. I said: Paul can you take me home, I left my choir books at home. And he came and picked me up and brought me home, got my books, and then a while later, practising with Ad Hoc Rock, for a gig, he turns up at my door and asks me for a date.

Liz

Where'd you go for first date?

Andrea

The first unofficial date was to Knox. We went to a pub sort of thing in the Knox Ozone. Our first official date we went to Warringal Lake with his dog.

Liz

So, you live separately…

Andrea

Yeah.

Liz

And that works well?

Andrea

Yeah. Financially and Paul’s mental health and my physical, physical challenges.

Liz

Yeah, I get that. We were talking off mic like earlier that having things set up in the best and most convenient way to suit your disability is a great advantage.

Andrea

It is.

Liz

Yeah.

Andrea

Paul finds my disability sometimes very stressful. And I find his very stressful, so…

Liz

It's a mature decision to come to.

Andrea

People sort of you know, you have a disability, he should live with you. And I say, I can cope very well on my own, thank you very much. I don’t need my husband here 24/7. I don’t need anybody here 24/7 cause I’m pretty…well I’ve injured myself cause I’ve had a fall, but I'm pretty high functioning.

Liz

Oh, no. Well, you can see that this your house is set up for you and it's... and it works really well and that's great.

Liz

Andrea, it's been absolutely lovely talking with you today and I feel like I've learned a lot about you and all of the things that you do, and it's been an absolute pleasure meeting you and Trouble. Thank you so much.

Andrea

Pleasure Liz.

(Music playing)

Liz

To find out more about Women with Disabilities Victoria go to: wdv.org.au