**Interview with Liz Wright and Kellie Butler**

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.

Are there any bands you’d travel the world to see? What about attending a conference to celebrate your favourite TV show? Kellie Butler’s done it all. She’s got a passion for pop culture, and she’s travelled the world to meet her heroes.

During this episode, there is mention of depression, anxiety and mental health. Please take care, and if you need support or assistance, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Kellie

Hi, I'm Kelly Butler. I live in Cobram, which is on Yorta Yorta land.

Liz

Hi, Kel. How long have you lived on Yorta Yorta land?

Kellie

I've been up here in Cobram for about 15 years.

Liz

Where did you come from?

Kellie

Melbourne originally. Grew up in Scoresby.

Liz

Oh, so what would make you move to the country? A tree change…?

Kellie

No, I sort of travelled. Moved around a bit. I ended up in Tasmania for 11 years, sort of branching out away from…not away from family but getting my independence.

Liz

Yeah, sometimes you have to put a bit of space between people around you. I think particularly if you've got a disability, and everybody wants to be super helpful or too directional.

Kellie

Yeah, so you know, when I moved back to the mainland I lived with dad for a while in Cranbourne. And by that time Mum was living up at Tocumwal, so I ended up, up this way to be closer to her.

Liz

And how did you find the, the change? I mean, I know Tassie is very different to Melbourne, but how did you find the change when you came up here?

Kellie

Well, I love it up here.

Liz

Yeah.

Kellie

It's much more relaxed and laid back and I go to Melbourne now and I just I'm there and I'm like, there's too many people. How can they handle this?

Liz

Yeah, too claustrophobic…

Kellie

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Liz

Now you're a wheelchair user. How do you find moving around Cobram?

Kellie

Most of the time it's alright, but there's still places I can't go, shops I can't get into. A lot of the footpaths need a lot of work, I can tell you that.

Liz

Yeah, that's a pretty common kind of thing throughout all of regional Victoria. A lot of footpath work needs to be done.

Kellie

Yeah. Yeah. It's mainly, just really a lot of the shops. It's so hard to get into and I don't, I still can't understand why it's not illegal to not have a ramp.

Liz

Oh yeah. I'm with you and I think it should be, you know, completely illegal, not even to have a ramp. But even if they cut in, got rid of the step and just cut in the curb as the door opens.

Kellie

Well, that's what the newsagency did.

Liz

Yeah. You know, every dollar, every dollar someone spends, whether you've got a disability or not, is a dollar that that shops makes.

Kellie

That's exactly right.

Kellie

Yeah.

Liz

Now you've got a small furry creature with you. Who’s that?

Kellie

Yes. This is Lexi. Lexi Lick-a-Lot. She's my assistance dog. She's a Chihuahua and she's three years old. She's. She's a Mind Dog, so…

Liz

What does that mean?

Kellie

She helps me with anxiety, and she's helped me with my depression and things like that. She has saved my life.

At the time I'd recently lost a dog. I'd had had Monty for 16 years. He wasn't a service dog, but he was my baby.

Liz

Yeah. Love of your life?

Kellie

Yes. And I was pretty depressed about that. Pretty down and I was struggling. We had a few losses in our family and my grandparents and things like that. And when I got her, she filled this giant gap in my life.

Liz

I think people don't understand how much you can love an animal and like with the cumulative effect of losing your grandparents and things too. But animals are just that comfort when you come home and you know, you obviously take Lexi with you everywhere.

Kellie

Yes. Yeah.

Liz

But, you know, I love it when I get home and my cat does a little lap of honour around my legs and you know…

Kellie

It's unconditional. It's what it is with them. It's unconditional love. And that's what it is with her. She's just she's given me something to live for.

Liz

Yeah. Did you train her?

Kellie

Yeah. What they do, they get a trainer who teaches you how to train the dog so that it helps with your bonding, because it's not good having someone else teach her to do these things for someone else.

Liz

Yeah.

Kellie

So that's why they taught me how to do it.

Liz

So, you've been inseparable for three years?

Kellie

Yep. Yep. Just about, only times we've been apart was - I went over to England for a few weeks last year and she had to stay with Mum. And then just the other night I was in hospital for a night, so she had to stay with my mum then.

Liz

I'm always interested in tourism and accessibility because…

Kellie

Oh yeah…

Liz

You know the difference in experience is your wheelchair user, I'm a woman with low vision. I found England overrated as far as how accessible it was.

Kellie

Oh, definitely.

Liz

Oh, so you do too?

Kellie

Well, you can tell the place was built by the Romans, but like they've had what, couple of centuries to put some ramps in, you know?

(laughter)

Liz

Yeah, I know. I think it's I think people get overexcited and think the UK is so advanced and all of that sort of stuff. But there's a million bloody cobblestones.

Kellie

Yes.

Liz

Micro doorways, all that sort of stuff. However, I did notice that there were a lot more shops that had little portable ramps at that they would put out for people which thought, you know, they're thinking, so that’ good.

Kellie

You know, in in London especially, it's like that. But there is there's a lot of times when I was in London where I'd had to go on the road or something or travel halfway back down the street to get across the road because there was no ramp to get down and get across.

Liz

No curb cuts and things like that?

Kellie

Yeah, no curb cuts

Liz

So, were you just on your own?

Kellie

Yep.

Liz

And where were you staying? Just in hotel accommodation?

Kellie

Yeah. Yeah, I started off in Birmingham. I went over there because I'm a bit of a…I’m into a TV show that not many people know called, Wynonna Earp…

Liz

What is it?

Kellie

Wynonna Earp.

Liz

What’s that? Is it based like on a female Wyatt Earp?

Kellie

She's Wyatt Earp’s great, great granddaughter…

Liz

Oh my god.

Kellie

And she's inherited the curse. It's kind of like supernatural, but with chicks.

Liz

Oh, my God. You have to text that to me.

Kellie

OK, I will. But I'm a huge…fans are called Earpers, and they had a big Earp convention over in Birmingham.

Liz

And what does an Earp convention look like?

Kellie

Some of the actors were there. The creator of the show was there. And there was probably at least a couple of hundred of us in this hotel.

Liz

Did you dress up?

Kellie

No, I didn't. I couldn't, actually…only because I couldn't fit my costume in my bag.

(laughter)

Liz

Why is it sort of like an elaborate costume?

Kellie

No, I'm I my costumes is… there's a police officer and she's really quite hot.

(laughter)

Kellie

And, so I sort of dress as her, but she sort of wears this Akubra…not Akubra hat, you know, like the old Stetson hat. I wouldn't have been able to fit the Stetson in the bag without wrecking it.

Liz

You would have had to have worn it on the plane.

Kellie

I would have.

(laughter)

Kellie

Would have got some looks.

(laughter)

Liz

Excuse me, ma'am. Just gonna sit down beside ya.

So, you went to Birmingham for that? What was that like? Like was a great fun?

Kellie

Oh, was amazing.

Liz

And did you meet up with people that you've been, like on Facebook or Insta with or TikTok...

Kellie

Yeah. Yeah, I did. And I made so many new friends and they were all so amazing. Like the second night one girl comes up to me, she says, oh we've booked a table at this restaurant. We booked a spot for you if you want to join us…

Liz

Oh, that’s brilliant.

Kellie

So that was just so, so nice. So, I went with them and just and yes still in touch with them on Instagram and all this sort of thing and…

Liz

Oh, that's fantastic. Where did you go after Birmingham?

Kellie

After that I got the train down to London and I stayed in Pimlico.

Liz

Where’s that?

Kellie

Not far from Westminster.

Liz

So, so really local to a lot of things happen.

Kellie

Yeah, yeah. And because I took my Batec with me, I've got this motorised trike that hooks on the front of my wheelchair and that got me around so much I hardly had to use public transport because I was just on that.

Liz

Is it just like an electric attachment that you can charge in your room?

Kellie

Yep.

Liz

How did I look after that on the plane?

Kellie

Thankfully they did not damage it but my…I had my wheelchair was kind of new at the time and it had some scratches on it, so I wasn't happy about that. But at least it was still in working order.

Liz

Yeah, the worst thing, arriving and either being left in the meet and assist room, and no one remembers that you're there. Or arriving and all your equipment is gone.

Kellie

That's right. Yeah. Because I was worried about the chair. I even put those GPS tags on them.

Liz

So, you stayed in London, and did you go anywhere else after that?

Kellie

I did day trips from there. I went out to Stonehenge, which was the most amazing place I've ever been.

Liz

Did you go into the middle of the circle?

Kellie

No, you're not allowed to anymore. You're only allowed to walk around. But it just has this feeling to it. And I sat there, and I felt at peace. It was the strangest thing.

Liz

People say that, and I often wonder because I haven't been. I often wonder if it's true, like, do you get the feeling, but you really felt it.

Kellie

Yeah, I felt it, yeah.

Liz

Wow.

Kellie

Which I didn't expect. I thought, oh you know, I mean, I always wanted to see it, but I thought bunch of rocks, you know?

Liz

Yeah.

Kellie

But there's just something about it. It's just. I mean, I'm not. I'm not a religious person, but it felt spiritual, almost. You know? It's weird.

Liz

When you came back from overseas, did you feel like that had changed you somewhat, having your first international trip?

Kellie

Well, I'd been to Norway before as well, so.

Liz

Oh. Oh, really? Tell us about Norway.

Kellie

I was my second international trip. I went to Norway about six, seven years ago I think it was.

Liz

Yeah. Where, you Earping?

Kellie

No, I wasn’t Earping, I was A-HAing.

Liz

You were what?

Kellie

My favourite band is A-HA.

Liz

Oh really.

Kellie

Yeah. Yeah. They did that Take on Me song.

Liz

And that film clip that everybody talks about.

Kellie

Everybody talks about. Yeah.

Liz

Really, so what was that like?

Kellie

Oh, that was amazing. I got sick of waiting for them to come back to Australia. They came here in 87, I think, and I've been waiting for them to come back. I'd never seen them live or anything. So, I thought bugger it, I'm going overseas to see them. So, I did. And I saw them three times, and I got to meet them.

Liz

Oh my God.

Kellie

And yeah.

Liz

What are they like?

Kellie

Well, it was only like a 30 second meet, so…

Liz

Yeah.

Kellie

It's hard to tell, but they were really nice when I did meet them. Yeah.

(Music playing)

Liz

So, what about romance? Are you…

Kellie

Sadly single. Oh, I should say happily single.

Liz

Are you happily single?

Kellie

Yep, yep, yep.

Liz

So, you're not looking for love?

Kellie

Look if it fell in my lap, fine, but I'm not out searching for it.

Liz

You’d have to push Lexi off.

(laughter)

Kellie

Well, she'd have to give the OK for it.

(laughter)

Liz

Yeah. Yeah. True.

Kellie

I've been single all my life. I've never had a relationship.

Liz

Wow. Is it an aspiration of yours…?

Kellie

Look I’d like to…

Liz

Or has it become…not that important to you?

Kellie

Look, I really would like to have a relationship. I would. But I know that's never going to happen. You know, that's sort of in my head. It's never going to happen. So, I just let myself be happily single.

Liz

I’m really curious to investigate this.

Kellie

Oh, OK.

Liz

No. Just really. Why is it in your head that it's not going to happen?

Kellie

Because I'm 52 years old and I've never had anyone interested in me. So why would it happen now?

Liz

Well, can I just say, when I first met you, this is so embarrassing for me. But I thought you were about 25. And then just Jen goes, No, no, she's not. And I thought, Oh, well, you're very youthful.

Kellie

Yeah. Immature. No.

(laughter)

Liz

Oh, oh, well, if things change, I definitely want to interview you. If that situation changes

Kellie

Yeah.

Liz

What keeps you occupied? You know, during the week?

Kellie

I work, I work on weekends, I work out at a holiday park in the kiosk and in reception. So that fills my weekends up and through the week, well, I don’t know really. We go for lots of walks, Lexi and I. Visit my family, go into town a lot. Once a week, I go down to Shepperton, have some therapy done on my back, and sort of have a look around at the town in there. I go to the cinema a bit here in town, to the movies.

Liz

So, Kel, what do you like about coming to the Cobrum Hub?

Kellie

The people. Yeah, it's just all so friendly and it's nice to talk to people who have got similar issues…

Liz

And not to be the only disabled person in the room.

Kellie

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. You sort of fit in. It's like everyone else outside in all the other rooms, are the weird ones.

Liz

Look, I'm plugging the Hub here, but it's, you know, the Cobram Hub has a beautiful vibe. But the other thing, too, is, it is a safe place for women to get together and not to feel self-conscious about disability and not to feel uncomfortable about being yourself.

Kellie

Exactly.

Liz

OK. So, you keep yourself pretty busy and you like living out here. Do you like the bush?

Kellie

Yeah. Do you? When we go for walks, because I take my trike, we go for long walks. We walk right along the beach, right along right along the river and up the levees and…

Liz

That sounds really nice.

Kellie

We go for about, well we went for about six ks this morning, she walked the whole way.

Liz

She would be exhausted.

Kellie

No, she went home and played. She's amazing. She's done ten Ks and went home and played the other week. She just keeps on going I tell you; I just wind her up and off she goes.

Liz

Yeah, that's beautiful. Now, you just said to me earlier when we weren’t on air that you'd had surgery on your eye. How’s that going?

Kellie

It hurts. Yeah. On Monday, two days ago, I had my eye straightened.

Liz

Were you awake through that procedure?

Kellie

No, thankfully. I was under for about an hour and a half apparently so. I got the train or caught the bus at 5 o’clock on Monday morning. Three degrees. Thank you very much. So, I caught the bus on the train down to Melbourne and had my Batec and zoomed off to the Eye and Ear Hospital. Had it done Monday afternoon. And then yesterday morning I got them to let me out early so I could catch the early train home.

Liz

And what's the recovery?

Kellie

I'm actually not sure. I've got to go see them in about a fortnight. I've got to go back down for check-up, so…

Liz

So, did you have sight in the eye before?

Kellie

Yeah. Yeah, it was just turned out when I was born. When I was born, I was born cross-eyed and they did repair it, but it still wasn't right. Like my, my right eye was still looking out, you know, to the side and most people didn't notice it, but I knew it was there and it bothered me.

Liz

Yeah.

Kellie

So, I thought to myself, I'm 52…well 52 almost, and this is something about myself I can fix. And if it helps my confidence because I know that I'm not going to, you know, because of the way that I looked like that. I'm so self-conscious about it.

Liz

Yeah.

Kellie

So, if it helps in a confidence or something like that. Well, and if it doesn't, it doesn't matter because I still, you know, I'm not pointing in two directions now.

Liz

Now, you said, well, you're gay and living in a rural environment. What's the pressure of being protective in a regional area? Or is it…?

Kellie

I actually haven't found any negativity about it.

Liz

Yeah.

Kellie

But it is still a lot in the closet here. I'm a member of Goulburn Valley Pride down in Shepparton. And we do a lot of things down there and about, oh, eight years ago I think it was, I tried to start up a pride group here in Cobram, but it just didn't take off. People just didn't come to it. I think that small town, they’re probably still that little bit scared.

Liz

Yeah. And Shepparton has got a much bigger population.

Kellie

Oh, definitely.

Liz

So, what sort of activities does Goulburn Valley Pride do?

Kellie

Well, they go to a lot of the marches, they do a lot of fundraising. Last week we they had a festival in Queen's Gardens for…

Liz

IDAHOBIT Day…

Kellie

IDAHOBIT Day yeah So, I went down and helped on the stall there and yes, just, just a lot of stuff like that.

Liz

Is that sort of like a safe and welcoming community like the Hub community?

Kellie

Oh definitely. It definitely is, yes.

Liz

That’s just great. You’ve positioned yourself in two areas where you can be absolutely yourself.

Kellie

Yeah. Yeah, that's it. No, no one else in my close family is gay. And, you know, it's sort of hard to like, you know, I can't sort of sit and go: Oh, she's cute and, you know, sort of thing. And my family sort of looks at me strangely.

Liz

They'd be uncomfortable, you think?

Kellie

Yeah. Yeah.

Liz

Oh well, wait til they hear this.

(laughter)

Kellie

Yeah. Whereas, you know, like, when I'm down there and I'm sitting with the girls and we see some someone, you know, cute walk past, we’ll go: Oh, she's all right. You go. Well, yeah. Look at you her, you know.

Liz

Yeah. So that’s nice to have that sort of community.

Kellie

You know, it's good not to be embarrassed by being attracted to somebody.

Liz

Yeah, of course.

Kellie

You know, so it's. It's that. And they understand a lot of what I'm going through as well with the whole gay side of me and things like that. So, you know, it really does help me.

Liz

So, Kel I hear you're a geek and you're going to Comic-Con. So, what's Comic-Con like?

Kellie

It's just a big, giant pop culture convention down in Melbourne. It’s Oz Comic-Con. I volunteer there when they do the Melbourne ones.

Liz

So, what do you volunteer as? Like just as like…

Kellie

They normally put me in the photo booth area. So, we basically wrangle the crowd when photos are being taken. And like you get to actually hang out in the booth and because they have a lot of actors and things there, so you get to sit there and have a chat with them and things like that and…

Liz

You do dress up for that as well?

Kellie

No, no.

Liz

I think you should start dressing up a bit.

(laughter)

Liz

It sounds like you've got the gear.

Kellie

Yeah. Oh yeah. I could go as Officer Hot, but you know.

(laughter)

Kellie

I should take it down and do it.

Liz

Well, yeah, you should. I think you should. And what aspirations do you have for, you know, the next wee while, like are you thinking of going back overseas?

Kellie

If, if I had the money, I'd be off traveling right now. I'd love to go to Canada. That's my one place I'd really love to go and well, I would really love to go to Manchester in August because that's when the Earp conventions is on.

Liz

Well, maybe you'll win Tattslotto.

Kellie

Maybe. I can make it to Manchester and see all my friends again.

Liz

Oh, see, that'd be great. Kel, it's been absolutely lovely speaking with you today…

Kellie

You too…

Liz

And I would really love to catch up with you soon. And I definitely want to see you as Policewoman Hot? Whatever her name is…

(laughter)

Kellie

Officer Hot, yeah.

Liz

Officer Hot.

Kellie

Sheriff. She Sheriff now. Yeah.

Liz

She's been promoted? All right. Thank you so much.

Kellie

Thank you.

Liz

It’s been really, really lovely to hear about you and what you do here in Cobram.

Kellie

You're most welcome. Thank you.

Liz

Thanks Kel.

(Music playing)

Liz

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