# Episode 2: Education and Awareness

Hello and welcome to episode two of this Australian Disability Network miniseries podcast on how to make Australian boardrooms more accessible, and inclusive.

My name is Andy McLean, and today we're going to be covering education and awareness. What you’ll hear are some practical suggestions on how to educate board members to elevate their understanding of people with disability. You'll also hear about some guiding principles for ongoing learning and development of board members, and we’ll also provide some useful definitions on disability just so that we're all on the same page from the start.

So, let's jump in and get started. Episode two, Education and Awareness.

Some people may fear saying or doing the wrong thing when it comes to working with people with disability. This lack of confidence can lead board members to sit back from the conversation because they're worried about getting something wrong, and this in turn, ends up excluding people. So, the first step is for boards to acknowledge that there is a gap in understanding. The second step is to accept that as humans, we all carry unconscious bias within us. And that can lead us to make incorrect assumptions about other people. The third step is to commit to an ongoing process of learning and education for the board.

And on that topic of education, let's hear a quote from Jeanine Drummond, who is the Chair of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, and a Board Member of the Australian Maritime College.

**Jeanine Drummond** 01:38

I think it's a continual space of growth. And it's really important to be talking and learning. And I think that's the message for other people is, we need to have a continually growth mindset to be able to keep doing better in this space.

**Andy McLean** 01:54

That was Janine Drummond. So, let's talk a little bit about disability confidence training.

A regular program of disability confidence training ensures that directors recognise and address unconscious bias and that they're equipped with the right language terms and competence. Board members will also gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by some of those people with lived experience of disability, all of which will help to foster a flexible environment where all board members feel valued, respected, and included.

Australian Disability Network provides a range of learning solutions that empower board directors to make change in their roles. And to make progress on access and inclusion. Check out AustralianDisabilityNetwork.org.au for more details.

In a moment, I'll talk about a useful definition of disability. But first, let's just talk quickly about guiding principles for the work that you can do with your board. Australian Disability Network recommends the following guiding principles.

Number one, never assume what a person can or can't do or how they experience disability.

Number two, always ask how you can assist and listen without judgment.

Number three, a person's disability is as unique as their fingerprint. No two people have the same experience or requirements.

So, let's talk a little bit about what we mean by disability. Disability used to be seen as a medical condition that required treatment or cure. Or fortunately, we now understand disability through the lens of interactions with someone's environment. The social model of disability describes disability as being the result of how people engage with their surroundings, including physical, digital and attitudinal barriers. When boards have such barriers, they hinder people from fully participating and or contributing effectively.

Now, disability varies widely. There are many types of disability and every person with disability has their own specific experiences and requirements. The Australian Disability Discrimination Act defines disability as “any impairment, abnormality or loss of function as any part of the body or mind including physical disability, mental illness, sensory impairment, intellectual disability, learning disability, neurological conditions, immunological conditions, and physical disfigurements”. Disability comes in many forms. It's a condition that restricts a person's mental, sensory or mobility functions. It can be caused by accident, by trauma, genetics or disease, and a disability may be temporary, maybe permanent, total or partial, lifelong or acquired, visible or non-visible. And disability is incredibly common. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2019 35.9% of Australia's households included a person with disability.

Let's end this podcast with the reflection from Tony Clark, who's the Chair of the International Association for Public Participation Australasia, Director of State Trustees Victoria, and a former director at Blind Citizens Australia,

**Tony Clark** 05:12

One of the biggest things we have to overcome is acknowledgement of fear. As a person, I lost my sight. It is a profound disability, you can't mince words, yeah, it impacts on every part of my life. And people look at me and see what I do. And I go, oh my God, I've got no idea how you do that. I've got no clues. You know, I would hate to be in that position. You might not articulate that. But that's honestly what's going through people's minds.

So, it's really important that we actually sort of acknowledge and we need to move past that. Okay, we need to get to the point where we acknowledge that people are people first. And you'll notice I'm using the term a person with lived experience of disability or you know, I don't say a disabled person, above and beyond everything else. We are all people. We all have different needs. And that's where we need to shift to, we need to shift to a needs-based approach.

**Andy McLean** 06:01

That was Tony Clark, and this is the end of this episode. Do tune in for the next three episodes, where we reveal more about how boards of directors can increase their representation of people with disability.

In the next episode, we'll talk about boardroom adjustments, and future episodes we'll cover culture and communication and recruitment practices, so there's plenty more to come. Every episode features input from directors who have lived experience of disability, providing practical suggestions and recommendations that board directors can put into action today.

All of our episodes are now available on our website, AustralianDisabilityNetwork.org.au. That's Australian Disability Network, all one word.org.au And that's where you'll also find our comprehensive directors guide on improving access and inclusion in the boardroom. We're already looking forward to sharing the next episode with you.

In the meantime, it just remains for me to say thanks very much for listening, and goodbye for now.