



Specific issues impacting Aboriginal people concerning Disability Justice “Taken Care of Business”

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“Taken care of business” is about HOW we will connect and approach with a sense of understanding the importance of cultural safety whilst working with indigenous people with disabilities within the disability justice space.

The term Indigenous is in conflict with the rest of my presentation and I will explain why, the term indigenous is a western term of reference of indigenous peoples of the lands, it is also used in the context of a Rights framework at state, national and international levels and I acknowledge those terms in relation to those Rights.

During my presentation I will share knowledge of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia whom I know have disabilities and who have entered, stayed and exited the justice systems over the course of my career and their lives. I will also use terms that will acknowledge their nations, clans and kinships. I will also follow appropriate protocols whilst a visitor on country and acknowledge the terms used and respect the Traditional Owners and Elders in doing so.

Taking care of business is what I do, it’s what we all do day to day... so I ask you "how do you take care of business that you do... day to day..."

I wish to acknowledge Aunty Norma for her wonderful welcome on country today. It’s a blessing to be welcomed as a visitor on the lands and to conduct business with you all. As I stated previously the use of language is essential in ensuring there is little confusion of my intent.

This is going to be a robust discussion and I will be confronting with my knowledge, experiences and expertise just so you’re clear, I won’t shy away from it...that’s my Irish & South Sea Islander heritage shining through. I will also be here to learn, to take part in a shared connection that will improve the lives of the most vulnerable in our families, who experience the justice systems and have disabilities.

I would also like to acknowledge that here in NSW, there is the Aboriginal Disability Network NSW and the head office of the national peak First People’s Disability Network (Australia). I acknowledge the Elders and board members at the national level and pay my respects to the work being done by those leading the change across Australia.

I also wish to acknowledge that as private consultant I am not a member or affiliated with either groups and wish to disclose there is no conflict of interest in my work with

their work. My Bio talks a little about me professionally, but here is what I know from my lived experience...there is not one part of my life where difference is acknowledged. There is no one person without their own special abilities and there is no one family member who prevents others from being culturally sound and appreciated.

I am lucky now...it hasn't always been the case. Here's why I do what I do.... let me share with you since before I was born my life was already experiencing trauma, racism, poverty, disability and a not so just society.

Born as a triplet, at Baker's Creek Mission outside of Mackay because my father was black. Being removed from my parents as a child in the early 1970s because my mother had a stroke and my father was black. Not finding out what "Deaf" meant till the age of 8 in school because of fear of being removed again because my father was black. Losing my identical twin sister because the health service didn't believe my mother, because she was married to my father who was black.

Not getting an education until I was 38 years of age because I had to work to support my family, because the needs of the family were greater and because my father had succumbed to being black. Not understanding sexual abuse, cancer, sexuality, English language and religion because of the abuse in the homes, schools, churches and hospitals because I was Deaf and silent. Not having good health outcomes and ongoing mental health concerns about my declining family because the health gaps are widening.

Seeing my brothers go to jail because they were black, abusive, and having undiagnosed disabilities. From losing my cousins in custody because they were black.

There is no more motivation for being resilient than this black woman in a fair bodysuit with the husky communication skills to share with you that by "**taken** care of business" you are "**taking** care of business".

Cultural Business: consists of similar structures of Western Business, however cultural business isn't being done anymore to improve the lives of people with disabilities in the communities. It's broken...I am not an academic or a statistics guru, but what is evident in services nowadays and in the past is that they are missing the HOW link of "taken care of business" when it presents itself.

These points are to open your thinking about the possibilities of what is currently exploding in your organisation and agencies? What is being deemed emerging and what has been current and pressing for years. What I see currently is that there is no connection to sharing the support that just one person needs...it's no longer about the collective. Especially with looming funding cuts, the NDIS, changing legislation and the impact of less access for philanthropy dollars.

The impact of ANY justice issues is escalating so fast it's to the point of seeing the destruction of a race of people. And also you're not alone, because within some families it is also allowing our own people a way out of "taking care of business" and cultural obligations...western business is about negotiations, fair pricing, profit and productivity

to maintain the status quo...and how and why these frameworks fail or thrive is based on timelines and structures. Which is always continuously conflict with cultural practices...? Let's discuss that later....

Historically the Societal changes to the roles and responsibilities of Aboriginal people impacts their life expectancies and choices. When disability related life choices are seen as insignificant, it is then deemed a NEED to supply, so a product is produced such as that of the welfare state. Where the WANT is to keep the people just inside the industry. You then as providers of services continue to look at their "taken care of business" from a very difficult and different term of reference.

By unpacking the business jargon that is used in western welfare businesses... we can see how the racial and discriminatory lens of languages are used. These languages then don't translate with cultural business and lore. Commitment and authenticity of communication and how we unpack disability in our own communities as well as across western services is confronting enough, but then the language barriers often fill you with uncertainty, animosity and fear. So you say nothing, you do nothing...

This is not new, what is seen are the services who NOW see the impact of that lack of awareness and training in understanding the specific issues faced by community, relating to their justice issues and their disabilities.

What is it that families understand of the justice systems? Their perceptions are most likely from learnt experience, shared knowledge within kinship groups and their own broader community. So their ongoing trauma and their own ability to educate their children with disabilities, their parents with disabilities about their current life needs doesn't cover outstanding or unnecessary justice related discussions. It becomes less important along their life continuum.

Families who will disengage before they confront a service, for being unable to assist because of their inability to trust and been burned by failed workers...there is a greater needed to ensure that front of house/frontline management and intake processes keep in mind the ability to ask the questions. Advocacy skills are secondary to listening knowledge.

So what is happening - research, research, consultations, forums, NDIS, gatherings...anything else? What should be happening...there is so much in the market now, how do our mob trust your mob? What is efficient and what is effective... being mindful and respectful of the term "culturally" (safety, appropriate, respectful, knowledgeable, awareness) - what does it mean to YOU exactly?

If you come away from a conversation using "culturally" in front of it, HOW do you apply it with families when "disability" isn't acknowledged, or it is, but isn't seen as being a problem for the person entering the justice system... especially if the family want a break... or the person with a disability wants a break... or believes it's a right of passage...that they are following in the footsteps of others. Thus we see the cycle

continue...not because of disability but because of race, gender, society's views of our men women and youth.

So...by supporting families, individuals and community we can open the effective communication pathways that will enhance our opportunities to acknowledge the wisdom, encourage the learning and share the care...this is about your ability to strengthen your listening knowledge.

To understand the process by which you conduct yourself and the intent of the work that YOU can deliver and what YOU DON'T PROMISE... there is often a change in families when they are given the tools to make change. But the tools I am giving you today are what you must unpack from within. Discussions today are the first part of our joint journey, we are all coming together for a common goal, to look at how we can support the Disability Justice Project to be a solid and a deadly framework.

By doing so we must take care of not becoming more about 'what are the outcomes', but 'whose outcomes'.

We may all know the perils of conformity, but let us all understand that what we hope to achieve is to have a fair and just system that will support and encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities to understand, take the steps and survive the justice systems across the country and not be scapegoated, micro-managed, labeled and forever stigmatised for not being informed.

In all honesty at the end of the day, the most important success you will achieve in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability, their families, kin and community is to be HONEST, to have TRUE INTENT of doing no harm and being support that has clear boundaries and expectations - offer only what you can give of yourself...all other offers are a bonus.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Interpreters, and also to the team here at ACWA for getting me here and looking after me, I hope that during the day you will come have an authentic conversation with me and we can get connected.

Thank you.