

Disability Done Different: Episode 11

Luke Bo'sher on...being a true believer

Podcast transcript

Audio Length: 00:41:52
Hosts: Roland & Evie Naufal
Guest: Luke B'osher

Intro

Maia: This is Maia Thomas; I am the DSC podcast producer and I just wanted to give you a quick rundown of DSC as an organisation before we get started. DSC is a team of 33 people across Australia, all working together to bring specialised training and consulting expertise to providers in the disability sector. Our focus is on helping providers to survive and thrive in the NDIS. Our purpose is better outcomes for people with disability.

Dialogue over intro jingle:

Evie: All right, here's what's going to happen now.
Roland: Hello, and welcome to our podcast.
Evie: We are DSC. Your turn, you're the boss. Disability Done Different, Candid Conversations.
Roland: Disability done different.
Evie: I hope you're ready because we're starting.

Start of Interview

Roland: Welcome to Disability Done Different, Candid Conversations. Our guest in the studio today is Luke Bo'sher.

Evie: Hi, Luke.

Luke: Hi, Evie and Roland.

Roland: Our theme is?

Evie: True believer.

Roland: It'll become obvious why we picked that theme as we go. We're really excited to have Luke in the studio with us because he's got so much to tell us. Basically, I met Luke in 2012. He was fresh out of Prime Minister and Cabinet, working for FaHCSIA. Both of those gigs, Prime Minister and Cabinet and FaHCSIA had been on scheme design. Luke will talk a little bit about that. From there, he moved on to be one of the founders of DSC, one of the four founding members, which was you, Evie, me, Luke, and Vanessa Toy. To my chagrin, Summer poached him from working with DSC to become CEO of the Summer Foundation, which is where he's at now. We're excited to have you here, Luke.

Luke: I'm very excited to be here. I feel very privileged to be on the podcast after such a stellar line up of people over the last couple of months that are all NDIS and disability superstars. It feels a bit intimidating to come onto the podcast after such a good line up.

Evie: [Laughter].

Roland: Yes, I think we're two of your biggest fans, Luke, even though we've worked together so much. One of the things we've always really loved about you, Luke, is that you combine, and it's a really unusual passion with technical detail and we don't see that a lot. You know, often the passionate people are big thinkers, I don't do detail, but Luke does both. We were so excited to be able to work with someone who knew some of the detail but still was passionate about it and he is the true believer. We'll talk a bit about that as we go. You worked in Prime Minister and Cabinet, you worked on design at FaHCSIA. Now, you're still intrinsically involved with the NDIS. Are you still a true believer?

Luke: I am still a true believer. I think the fundamentals of the scheme are absolutely right. It's about getting the implementation right. I've been a true believer for a long time and I'm still a true believer. My current role at Summer Foundation, we see sometimes where the scheme isn't working well, but we also see other times where the scheme is

delivering people amazing outcomes that were never possible prior to the NDIS. It's when I see those examples of where the scheme works really well, to give people really genuine choice, live in high-quality housing with the support they need. That's really transformational for people's lives. That keeps me a true believer.

Roland: Yes, and sometimes we forget the good news stories because there are a lot of good news stories out there because we tend to see the pointy end the bad news stories, don't we? Luke, you worked in Prime Minister and Cabinet, did you get to meet the Prime Minister?

Luke: I did get to meet the Prime Minister. At the time, Julia Gillard was the Prime Minister and was really closely involved in the negotiation of the scheme with the states and the design of the scheme. There were lots of opportunities to meet the PM and work through a lot of the detail around the NDIS.

Roland: If you had your chance again to work in Prime Minister and Cabinet, I often imagine you in that space again, what would you say to the Prime Minister now if you could travel back in time and you had that five/seven years under your belt? What's one piece of advice for the Prime Minister?

Luke: It seems a bit gratuitous to give a piece of advice to the Prime Minister.

Evie: [Laughter].

Luke: If I was giving one piece of advice, it would be that when we designed the scheme, we always knew that a lot of things were being tested. We had the launch sites, which became the trial sites. They were all about testing how the scheme would work. I think one of the things that's really difficult for government is, once you've decided to do something a particular way, or you've agreed to something, the threshold for changing that is really high.

The idea of how we came up with the mainstream interface or how we designed a single national agency, those things were always agreements with the states that were going to be reviewed, people would come back, we'd make sure that all of those things were working correctly. Everything wasn't setting a precedent. When it comes down to it, it was a precedent because it's become really difficult to change some of the parts of the scheme.

Roland: To change it.

Luke: Yes, that's right. Making changes is much more difficult than we anticipate. I think if I had one piece of advice, it would be to think about the fact that we might all be sitting in a room saying, we're just trialling something, it doesn't set a precedent if it's not

working, we'll come back and change it. Actually, coming back and changing things is really tricky in government.

Evie: I think a lot of people in the sector would argue that they're experiencing too much change as is, right? Even though some of those changes are really positive, fixing things that were broken. There's a lot of resistance to it.

Roland: I was thinking about this in respect to the Local Area Coordination. Surely, that's been a bit of an experiment in the way we've rolled out Local Area Coordination, but we've given tens of millions of dollars in contracts to organisations. They've got staffing, they've got offices, they've got all of this infrastructure built around it now. There's a whole industry now dependent on that model of Local Area Coordination. You can imagine the lobby if we try to change it to something that is different. The system builds itself and does it pretty quickly. Inertia hits pretty quickly, when things stay the same, very much so.

I often talk about the NDIS in public forums. Someone at the back will sometimes say at the end of it. Well, how would you fix it? It's like, ah, shit, I really hate that question because there's no easy answer, is there? If I had the opportunity, I'd slow it down, but I know in 2012, in Prime Minister and Cabinet, they didn't want to slow it down, they wanted something they could take to the election and so, there wasn't the opportunity to head that advice anyway. I'm pretty sure FaHCSIA was giving the Prime Minister that advice.

Luke: That comment about slowing down the scheme is something that a lot of people would say, that part of the reason we're having, or we've had some of the problems that the scheme has had is because it got rolled out too quickly. I think it's important, though, also to think about what would have happened if we had another year of time to plan for the scheme? Having worked as one of the bureaucrats in designing the scheme, what we're talking about when we're talking about slowing it down is another six months, or another twelve months of a whole bunch of public servants sitting in a relative ivory tower, trying to design in theory how an NDIS would work.

My view on the speed of the rollout is that we learned way more in the first month of actually delivering the scheme, meeting with participants, doing planning. I think we learned way more in one month than we would have learned, and we would have been able to work out in twelve months of people sitting there in theory, how is this scheme going to work? So many of the issues that come up, so many of the problems that have arisen, they're really hard to foresee unless you're actually out there at the coalface with participants. I get why people talk about wanting to slow it down. I think the idea of learning while you're doing, I think is much more effective in the NDIS than a whole

bunch of people sitting around before we even had an agency, trying to whiteboard things and work them out conceptually.

Roland: Not wanting to get too technical because it's not that much fun, but the bilateral don't allow you a lot of wiggle room, do they? You setup contracts with the states between the federal government and the states, which are the bilateral agreements. Once they were locked down, the wiggle room was gone, wasn't it?

Luke: Yes, the wiggle room in the speed of the rollout was locked in the bilateral. We had three whole years of launch sites. That was a long time to work out all of these problems. Yes, I think three years is a long enough time to be able to understand what those problems are and be ready for that transition period.

Roland: Yes, if we'd been able to do that.

Evie: Except, that we outed LACs in 2016 with the actual rollout, that wasn't a trial site, as in the planning LACs.

Roland: Explain that a bit, Evie.

Evie: Well, like I would say one of the biggest problems with the NDIS is implementation has been giving LACs the role of planning. That was a decision which was made in 2016 when we had the first LACs to get the planning role formally was in Northeast Melbourne, which is in 2016, it wasn't a trial site at all. In that sense, I think one of the biggest issues is one of the ones that wasn't tested.

Roland: We were involved in that tender and we all fell off our perches when we first read the contract documents which had planning as the key focus of LAC because I remember coordination was never meant to be that function.

Evie: I could be wrong. I kind of remember people in...

Roland: No, you're right.

Evie: Talk about PLACs for a while, yes planning LACs.

Roland: Yes, there was a little bit of that on the trial site. Coming back to the true believer theme, Luke, you have got a career based on passion and purpose and we know you well enough to know that that's genuine. There must be times when you felt pretty disillusioned. Sometimes in the dark of night, it's been a pretty difficult week/month in what's being done. How do you stay fresh, because you come across as the person that's committed to staying fresh and positive?

Luke: For me, I think that resilience point is so important in the NDIS. It's important for me, I know it's important for a lot of people that I work with. I know a lot of the DSC team, it's important, as well. For me, it is about focusing on the things that are going well. I

think I would find it really tough to work in a space where 100 percent of what I saw were things not going well. At Summer Foundation, we work a lot with people in aged care and people in hospital settings. Most people in aged care are there because the existing systems haven't worked to support them to stay in the community or come back to the community after they acquire their disability.

There is a lot of examples of where the systems aren't working. There are also enough examples of where things are working, and when they work, people get a really transformational outcome. For me, it's about seeing that and being able to be really close to those examples in practice, about where things are working well. It's also about the people you surround yourself with though. I know that there are a lot of people who are doing it really tough in the NDIS, but if your entire network of people that are doing it tough, I think that would be very hard to continue to be resilient.

I try to surround myself with a mix of people. Some people that are really positive and doing good work that's getting a lot of traction. Also, people that are really struggling and finding it really hard to navigate their way through. I think that balance of who's in your network and who you spend time with is really important.

Roland: Yes.

Luke: You don't want to go off – you don't want to surround yourself with only people that are having a good experience in the NDIS because then you end up with this really false sense of positivity and can end up a bit blinkered to where the challenges are in the scheme. Equally, if you just surround yourself with people that are doing it tough and finding it really hard to navigate their way through, I think I would find that very hard to stay positive.

Evie: I'm co-hosting a support coordination national summit on 24 June, by the time this episode comes out, it will have passed. The whole theme of the summit for support coordinators. It's sort of tapping into the idea of resilience, that we see a lot of support coordinators really struggling to be resilient in the face of a lot of conflict, a lot of difficulty. We wanted to have the theme be about celebrating and learnings. We're getting all of these great stories of people who are doing interesting innovative things with their funding.

Then someone sent through an email with a story she wanted to share about working with people with a life-limiting illness. My first response was like, that sounds really difficult. That's like not 'celebrate and learn and fun', but we'd be doing such a disservice to the work that support coordinators do to leave that darker, harder side out of it. It's going to be featured in the summit, I'm quite excited to see how it goes. It's holding that tension of trying to stay position, look at the best practice, look at the things

that are going really right and at the same time, keeping in mind that there are still some really difficult parts of those roles.

Roland: Yes, we talked to Rod Harris on a podcast that's still to be released, that will be out pretty soon, but he worked as the CEO of motor neuron disease for over 20 years and dealing with a lot of sudden onset disability that leads fairly quickly to death. There's a lot of positivity in that, Evie, there was a lot of resilience. The theme could have easily been resilience and how people make the most of their lives when they're challenged. I want to ask you, Evie, too, because you hit a low spot a year or so ago, where it was just – maybe it was 18 months' ago – where it was just, shit and corruption.

Evie: I hit that spot every week after I run workshops. It's called the dark place. [Laughter].

Roland: You've found a couple of ways of pulling yourself out, do you remember?

Evie: No, do you?

Roland: Yes. You'd seen a podcast that was really inspirational.

Evie: That's right. I do remember what you're talking about now. I'd gone through running a series of workshops with support coordinators. Again, just seeing so much resistance internally of people who were just so sick and tired of the NDIS and had given up on getting good outcomes. I was just starting to feel really cynical about it all. Then I listened to this podcast that was talking about headwinds and tailwinds. It was saying that we noticed the headwinds – what is it called? Is it a headwind?

Roland: Yes.

Evie: It was saying that we notice the headwinds so much more than the tailwinds, like when you're riding your bike. You just think to yourself; I can't wait for this wind to be behind my back. Then as soon as it is, you forget. Then you take it for granted. I think that was really helpful for me to think about, that we recognize and that you see the resistance a lot more than the things that are on our tailwinds and taking the time to think about all the things that are on our tailwinds.

Roland: That's cool. Luke, back to the true believer and I'll keep pulling us back to it. I'm old enough to remember the public service when it was a permanent tenure, people went there because it was a concept of real public service. It got politicized decades ago. It's gone through all kinds of imaginations, but you strike me, you've always struck you as the quintessential public servant. I mean that in a really positive, an archetype of what we'd want a public servant to be.

Evie: Don't be offended. [Laughter].

Roland: No, it's a really positive statement. Can you – we're talking to my second-youngest daughter Elise about potentially going into the public service and I always get her to talk to you about that sort of stuff. Where do you see public service in 2019? Is it real? Are there people there that are trying to make a difference? Is it too big a question?

Luke: I think there are absolutely people there that are trying to make a difference. I think there are a lot of very passionate, really smart people working in the public service. I think, for me, one of the really important characteristics of good public servants and a good public service is the understanding of what happens outside the public service, as well as what happens inside the public service. I think that's something that the public service isn't particularly great at. I think there are great pathways if you start as a graduate in the public service and work your way up. It's also, it can be, quite an insular institution, public service.

I think there's a strong bias towards recognising and rewarding people based on their public service achievements, but I think it's not as sophisticated in the public service about how to recognise and transfer in from the not-for-profit sector and from the private sector and from academia who have really useful skills and experiences and talents that could benefit the public service. For me, a really important characteristic is the ability to move out from being in the public service, to being in the not-for-profit sector. Coming back, going to the private sector, coming back. I think that transferability between working in government and working outside of government is really important and we don't do that enough. That's been something that's always been important to me.

I started my career pre-public service working in the not-for-profit sector. I worked for a community sector, peak body in the ACT. I also worked in disability service delivery and supported a com for kids and young adults with very significant acquired disability in the care and protection system. Came into government with a very strong sense of what it's actually like out there in the social services sector, as a front-line worker, but also in a community-sector peak policy role. I found that really invaluable in government, to be able to translate back to what's actually happening on the front line.

Roland: Yes. Let's follow that train of thought and follow your career for a moment. From those roles, you went to Prime Minister and Cabinet and FaHCSIA on design of the scheme, then you disappeared for about six months. Where was Luke? There was this good guy that answered questions and I couldn't find him anymore. Then I got an email from New York and Luke's on a Fulbright scholarship. Do you want to tell us what Fulbright was about and then we can talk a bit about what the email was about, as well?

Luke: I'd been working on the NDIS for what felt like a really long time, in practice, it probably wasn't all that long, but it felt like an eternity.

Roland: Yes, dog years.

Luke: I'd been at PM&C, FaHCSIA, then I worked at the agency during the start of the launch sites. For me, I got to the point where I needed a bit of space away from the NDIS and a bit of space away from Canberra. I'd lived in Canberra for over a decade. It was time to get out of living in Canberra. I decided that I wanted to have a bit of an ability to reflect and think about things a little bit more after a really hectic couple of years on the NDIS. I was incredibly fortunate to have gotten a Fulbright scholarship to be able to go over to the U.S. and spend two years there studying. I went to New York University, to NYU, with a focus on affordable housing and social investment and pay for success. How we can focus more on outcomes and government and pay based on outcomes rather than just based on outputs.

Roland: Fulbright is a big deal, it's a really big deal, so congratulations on that.

Luke: Thank you. It's an amazing group of people that get Fulbright scholarships, so it was great to be able to connect with people from not just Australia but from all over the world that had gotten a Fulbright scholarship and were really passionate about not just social policy but a whole range of different areas.

Roland: Another quick tangent because part of a power couple, Kate who is your partner now and you're living in North, but Kate was doing pretty amazing stuff, too, so a quick word for Kate?

Luke: [Laughter]. We were both over there together but slightly separate, so I was in New York at NYU and Kate was at Harvard at the Kennedy school.

Roland: It just rolls off the tongue, Harvard.

Evie: I was expecting him to say, she was in Boston.

Luke: [Laughter]. It's interesting because we both had these quite different – universities in the U.S. have quite different characters maybe more so than here. New York is a very socially progressive university. The public policy school is very filled with activists, people that are really wanting to change how things work, very keen on grassroots organising and grassroots advocacy work. Very focused on a local government level in the U.S. Whereas, Harvard is quite different. It's a lot of people who have come out of a more traditional public sector background. It's more focused on national issues. We had this really fantastic combination of friendship groups in New York. A very progressive activist friendship groups up in Boston, at Harvard. Much more of a traditional but really challenging, intellectually challenging group of friends.

Roland: Great people to bring to a dinner part, I can tell you that.

Evie: The email.

Roland: Yes, do you remember the email, because I do?

Luke: Yes, I think I was sitting around in New York and thinking, I've enjoyed six months of a break, I've really enjoyed moving to New York, I've enjoyed studying, and I'm really getting into that. I also felt like I had all of this experience and knowledge on NDIS. It felt to me like it was a bit wasted. Sitting in the U.S. and not contributing back. I was keen to think about, how do I continue to contribute in a way that would provide a benefit to people back in Australia, but in a way that might work while I'm overseas.

Roland: Yes, so Luke wrote to me and said, is there any possibility I'd be able to work for him in New York with DSC. It was like, hell yeah, but I have no idea how. At the same time, do you want to tell your foundation's story about the boy in the 5,000...?

Evie: [Laughter]. Before I was working with DSC, I was working for an American multinational in Brussels. I decided to move home and as you do, two weeks before I left, I fell in love, and so I came back home and then was like, right, I'm going to leave again right away, but I need some money, dad, will you please fund me to go back and follow this adventure? In the end, we struck a deal that I would build DSC's website. That was my beginning with DSC, and I got sucked into it from there, because we started with the resource hub.

Part of the process of developing the website was like, the website we're building has got this functionality to write articles and you were really keen to have a newsletter. We just started sharing newsletters. I think it's not unfair to say that Luke's articles paved the way. Luke at the time was writing articles, incredibly detailed articles about housing policy. That really laid the foundation for DSC's reputation now as being people who know what they're talking about.

Roland: Yesterday, you and I were reflecting would DSC have been a success without Luke, because we see you as the foundation model for the business we now run, which is all subject matter specialisations. Luke brought passion and purpose and gave us great detail about SDA, special disability accommodations. Also, breaking news, you did that thing, here's some news, here's some news. It made our newsletter really popular, really quickly. It showed that if you had the technical expertise but also gave a shit, which you do, that people would want to listen. You developed a following and then we started running these workshops.

Evie: [Laughter].

- Roland:** The workshops took years off my life because we would video conference you in and the technology would always break down. I didn't have the technical expertise to stand up and fill in the bits when work was broken down, so we'd have this big screen, we had big audiences, we had 100/150 people in the room. Every time Luke paused, just didn't move his face, I'd freak out and think it was frozen again.
- Evie:** [Laughter].
- Roland:** We ended up flying you into Melbourne rather than keep that stress going a couple of times and brought you over. Luke worked two days a week, so our business DSC began, for people who are interested, with Evie working in Belgium on paying off \$5,000 to her dad and building the website which you see now.
- Evie:** [Laughter].
- Roland:** It's had a few iterations but that's still Evie's work, the look and feel, with Luke doing his what subject matter specialisation looks like, here's what passion and purpose looks like. Here's the occasional breaking news. Vanessa and I were running this series of workshops all around Australia and occasionally video conferencing you in on the more successful ones. One of the things that used to piss us off the most was at the end of the day of the workshop, people would say, "We really love Luke." It's like, come on, the guy was on a video conference for an hour, we've done all of this face-to-face stuff and you're all telling us you love Luke. Anyway. That was the original genesis of DSC and it's still very much who we are. About a year and a half ago we said, let's break the business down into all of those subject matter specialisations of SIL and SDA.
- Evie:** Support coordination planning, marketing, strategic planning.
- Roland:** Yes. Then said, let's all be like Luke. We're doing it.
- Luke:** I think there was also a time, maybe it was at the end of 2013, or maybe the end of 2014, where we sat down face-to-face in Melbourne and had a bit of a DSC planning day, and it was Roland and Evie and Vanessa and me. I feel like I remember that conversation, where you and Roland and Vanessa were saying, "We don't want to have to manage people anymore. We don't want to have to be responsible for anyone. We're very happy with just the four of us. We can do it. Doing some part-time work. Let's not grow."
- Evie:** [Laughter].
- Roland:** Let's not grow, yes.
- Luke:** It's like we came away from those couple of days going yes, we're not going to grow, we're just going to keep doing the thing were doing. Then six months' later, I think you had a team of 15 subject matter specialists.

Roland: Yes, we still do that, we still say we're not going to grow, and it keeps growing.

Luke: I think it speaks to the demand that a whole range of people have, including service providers, but not just service providers, you've done work for government, you've done work for area coordinators. For a whole bunch of different people. I think it comes from that demand from people that want to work with consultants, that not only are passionate, that are not only technical experts, but also have a vision for how things can change in the NDIS, and what sort of benefits we can get for people with disability out of the scheme.

Evie: Beautiful Luke, thank you.

Roland: That loops us back to your work in SDA. You wrote the original specialist disability accommodation policy before it was called that and have followed it ever since. I see on the Summer Foundation, it's your bread and butter. Do you want to tell us a bit about what we've lost and what we need to do?

Luke: Yes, from my perspective, it's been a really fascinating journey, because one of the things you often don't get to do in government or outside of government is go from an idea all the way through to that idea being fleshed out, becoming legislation, and then...

Roland: Then it's too operational.

Luke: Yes, and then becoming operational. It's been a real privilege for me to be able to see something go from an idea or a couple of paragraphs in a productivity commission report, through to something that as of a couple of months ago, we did a survey of providers and found that over 1,500 knew specialist disability accommodation places under construction across the country. I would wager it's probably more like 2,000 as of now. That's an extraordinary thing, that I think the scheme has been able to create is 2,000 new housing places, many of which are really high quality, really well-located housing places for people with disability to move into.

I think that's an extraordinary thing. It's one of the things that government finds really hard to explain about the scheme because everything is so individualised in the scheme, it's really challenging for government to be able to have a narrative with the public that says, "The extra money we're spending on the NDIS, the extra focus we're having on this as a government is leading to these kinds of results." It's a market, it is genuinely a market out there. I think government finds it hard to tell a narrative about what's happening in the marketplace. I think it's a great success story, or it's the foundations of a great success story in SDA.

Evie: I have a question for you that I think a lot of our listeners will have, which is about the future of people being allowed to live alone in NDIS, because I think there's big

disconnect between what the policy would have said and the principles of it all and then what we're actually seeing in practice. Can you say anything more about that?

Luke: Yes. I can talk about our experience at Summer Foundation. Some people listening to the podcast might know that Summer Foundation prototyped some really assessable apartments for people with disability that were one person per apartment. They were salt and peppered throughout an apartment building. We prototyped that in Abbotsford with the TAC. We prototyped that we scaled that up to ten apartments in the Hunter and the trail site in a larger apartment building, where they were, again, salt and peppered. That's always been based on people living by themselves.

Not because that is – we don't have a view that everyone should live by themselves, but we certainly met a lot of people in aged care who didn't want to live in a shared, group home setting. That wasn't appropriate for them, so aged care became one of the only other options that they had. For us, it spoke to a gap in the market of something people with disability wanted but weren't able to access. We prototyped that and we've worked with a lot of providers in the market to replicated and scale that up. A lot of the construction of new places that are in the pipeline are single resident properties.

More than 400 of the places currently under construction are for single resident occupants in an apartment setting. Certainly, on the supply side, there's a lot of interest in scaling that up. There were challenges with the NDIS messaging about whether the people would be able to live alone. We've worked really closely with the NDIA over the last 12 months since that came out. Worked really closely with them on the evidence base about what living alone means in terms of people being more independent, having a lower lifetime support cost and using data from the transport accident commission and other projects that we've been involved in.

Have really explained to the NDIA that we're promoting this model and what we think it achieves. That's been really successful. Over the last six months or so, we've supported 70 people with disability in the scheme to get funded, to live alone with single resident SDA payments and a support model that's individualised to them. To me, that speaks to the results of the NDIA on the ground allowing people to live alone.

Evie: Yes, that's fantastic.

Roland: That's great. I think that leads us into – let's talk about the Summer Foundation because, kudos to Di Winkler for setting up the Summer Foundation. I often think it's a high point in our society because from my point of view, what the Summer Foundation does is develop really innovative, interesting, market-based products and then gives away the intellectual property. Gives away the information. Do you want to tell us what Summer is doing?

Luke: Yes. That was something that really attracted me to Summer Foundation as an organisation that wasn't about furthering its own growth but was about supporting other organisations to grow and improve the quality of what they do. Summer Foundation has this particular focus on younger people in residential aged care. We talk about it in terms of NDIS participants who are in aged care, or NDIS participants who are stuck in hospital. That means we work with a much bigger group than that, but that's our really core focus.

Our vision is that over the next three years, that we could halve the number of young people that are in aged care across the country and earlier this year, the government brought out an action plan on young people in aged care that also had a similar target about halving the number of young people in aged care over the next few years. This is the other thing that I really liked about the Summer Foundation before I joined, was this focus on a really clear and measurable goal. I think one of the things that I really struggle with is, where there's an unattainable goal that this goes to the resilience question, if you've got an unattainable goal, it always feels like you're so far away from achieving it.

Whereas, we can measure year-by-year how many fewer young people are going into aged care. I think that's a really motivating thing for people in the organisation because it keeps you really focused on what you're here to do, and you can check in on your progress quite regularly. There's a pathway to achieving that goal of stopping young people from going into aged care altogether. Within the organisation, we do a mix, we do...

Roland: Great website, yes.

Luke: [Laughter].

Evie: Yes, some of the best resources in the sector.

Luke: Yes, so developing resources, something that a lot of people would know us for, we do quite a lot of policy advocacy work, so working with government about the scheme design, but also about hospital issues, health issues, housing policy. We do research and trying to build the evidence based. We also run some prototypes. Some people might have seen the housing hub website, which lists disability accessible accommodation vacancies across the country.

Roland: I want you, if it's okay, Luke, to put your policy hat back on and help Evie and I with a discussion we were having the other day. I rang you last week, Evie, from a conference I was at. Basically, people were talking about thin markets, which I believe is a euphemism for market failure in Australia, where rural and remote people and CALD people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and a bunch of other sectors and

cohorts aren't able to get the services they need in a market-based outcome, or a market-based delivery. I ring up Evie basically from a conference lunch time and say, what about this article? This article is, where there's no market, we should be block funding, we should have always thought about block funding into the no market situation, rural and remote, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Your response, Evie, was?

Evie: That would be – what was my response?

Roland: It's always no.

Evie: Well, yes, I always start with no when it's your idea. I think the reason I was saying no this time was that it would be taking the opportunity away from people. That in some ways I totally agree, that there are great options to block fund, but I think I thought that it was taking people's rights away.

Roland: Also, you spoke about, corny language, but green shirts we're starting to see. You talked about a service in Melbourne.

Evie: Yes, that's right, I was saying that it takes away the potential for one-to-one solutions and that's the stuff that's quite exciting. It's quite labour-intensive to create, but rather than having a block funded day service in a regional area, fund the people in that regional area for extensive support coordination, so they can find those opportunities to be working in the nursery three days a week, or in the library or whatever it might be within the community, so the funding is going to the community. It's more inclusive, it's more individual. It takes a lot more time to setup.

Roland: You also get the example in Melbourne about a service that is setting up in the niches where people aren't providing services?

Evie: Yes, there's a service that's setup in Melbourne that's designed specifically for night-time shifts, or for last-minute shifts. There are all these markets where nobody wants to go yet because the incentives are still wrong because the metro providers still have more than enough participants than they've got the workers to fill the capacity for. At the moment, we're not seeing anybody move out there, but I just think maybe it takes time, it takes more workforce investment.

Roland: Where do you sit, Luke, on the market versus block funded, thin market, market value?

Luke: I think I sit on the Evie end of this spectrum.

Evie: [Laughter].

Luke: I think ultimately about; do we think that governments can make better choices than people with disability about where to get their supports from? Right. This is ultimately

about, if government is not going to put any more money on the table, like, if we're saying that block funding isn't about increasing the amount of money, it's just about a different commissioning process, I think it has to come back to the idea that we think governments are going to be better able to make choices about what services are available for people with disability themselves. I think what we lack are structures to be able to bring people with disability together, to jointly purpose services.

I think this is my qualification on Evie's support coordination comment is, when I think about our core business, young people in aged care, if we went up to the Goulburn region in Victoria for example, and found 20 young people in aged care that wanted to leave, the current model is, all 20 of those people will have their own individual support coordinator. We'll find 20 young people in aged care, all wanting to move out to towns across the Goulburn Malley area, they'll all have chosen an individual support coordinator, they'll be individually picking up the phone and calling a whole host of different housing providers. Like, that's not a sensible way to engage with a housing market.

What we need are ways to be able to bring people together, so that ten of those twenty people in aged care who want to leave can connect with each other and talk to each other about, this is what I want, this is what I want, come up with a brief for housing providers that say, the ten of us want these ten different properties to be built, who in the housing market will do that for us?

Evie: Do you know who should have been doing that role, is local area coordinators?

Luke: Absolutely.

Evie: Coordinating the local area. It would have been a classic role.

Luke: A classic role for local area coordinators.

Evie: It's not happening.

Roland: They don't have the capacity because they're too busy planning.

Luke: There's also an expertise question in there, as well. Like, did we choose local area coordinators on their ability to be really good marketing intermediaries? Or did we choose them on some other characteristics? I don't recall that market aggregation and being a market intermediary was a real feature. I think if you go back to the productivity report, that was the disability service organisation, the DSO model was all about was providing that ability for people to use their package, implement their package.

I think that's been translated in part into support coordination, in a really choice-based model, which is great. I think we don't have ways for support coordinators to work together and we don't really have ways for people with disability to choose the right

support coordinator for their outcomes. I think there's a lot of work to do to fix that piece. I reckon that's a better way to fix the thin markets problem than for some bureaucrat in Canberra to decide what organisation should be providing a program in what town.

Evie: See, he's good. This is why people liked watching him on the video conference, even when it was stressful.

Roland: It's true. It's interesting, I actually remember where you were. I remember, Luke, when you first came back from the Fulbright scholarship and it was early 2016 and you wrote an article for us on the failure to innovate. Do you remember what was in that article? Can you tell us what the failure to innovate was about?

Luke: Well, I remember why we wrote the article because we were really disappointed at the time, I think at DSC that we weren't seeing more really amazing innovative things happening in the market. In 2016. At the time, if you've said to people, tell us ten innovative things, people would really struggle to count beyond the first hand of fingers to be able to come up with innovative things happening. I don't know that we're in that much of a different space three years on from doing that.

Roland: Yes, I'd agree.

Luke: What with the barriers that we talked about at the time, they're still relevant. The NDIS is really focused on paying for hours of service delivery rather than paying for an outcome. I think that's one of the biggest challenges here is that organizations want to be achieving outcomes for participants. From a public policy sense, we all want to focus on outcomes, yet, the scheme focuses on funding individual hours of activity.

Roland: Yes, that's really important.

Luke: I think what we need to do is move more towards paying for the outcome of supporting someone to leave home or leave hospital rather than paying for an hour of service delivery. I think from an organisational perspective; we also need to find ways for organisations to capture more of the value when they innovate. in the NDIS at the moment, it just means that participants end up with unused funding in their plan that goes back to the NDIS

Roland: For more efficient or smarter or more innovative, I don't get any incentive to be any of those things because I don't get to keep the money for being better at what I do.

Luke: Why invest in the systems and the networks to be a really great support coordinator, if it just means that you'll only use five of your twenty hours of support coordination.

Roland: Yes, in fact, I'll lose money because I don't get to use all the hours. Yes.

- Luke:** Then the last thing that was a real blocker for innovation was around how organisations work together to come up with innovative things. Innovation is really expensive, a lot of the organisations we see being really successful at DSC are niche, on the ground, very specialist organisation. They need to work together to be able to innovate. More ways to bring finance together with a lot of small expert providers, to create innovative options.
- Evie:** Did you catch that, “We at DSC...”?
- Luke:** [Laughter].
- Evie:** One of us, one of us.
- Roland:** The sad part is, that’s an article from January 2016 and it’s all still totally relevant. You were going to rewrite it, weren’t you?
- Evie:** Yes, I went to rewrite it last year and I was like, no, that’s all still good. I’d still point at all the same things. Then I’d point to the additional one, we probably didn’t see as much in January 2016, which is just the lack of bandwidth. That the organisations are already just treading water, trying to transition, trying to implement all the quality and safeguards, all of that kind of stuff. Innovation seems to be a low priority, which it is.
- Roland:** It was a pretty serious podcast. I think we’re just wrapping up. The true believer is certainly the correct theme. What do you do for fun, Luke?
- Luke:** I need to do some really good switching off for fun. I’m not very good at switching off. I need to do things where I just have no access to internet, phone, power. I do a lot of multi-day hiking.
- Roland:** Cool.
- Luke:** I find that a really good way to switch off, to be out in the wilderness with your backpack, with your dehydrated camp food and really immerse yourself in something that is not thinking about the NDIS, which I do for the rest of my life when I’m not doing multi-day hikes.
- Evie:** [Laughter].
- Roland:** Thank you, Luke, thank you for being our guest on our Candid Conversations podcast. Also, thank you for being one of the founding members of DSC and being a model of how we currently operate.
- Evie:** Thanks, Luke.
- Luke:** No worries, it’s such a privilege to come and reflect on what’s been a great four years/five years of working together.

Roland: Thank you.

End of Interview

Outro

Evie: You've been listening to Disability Done Different, Candid Conversations. A podcast by Disability Services Consulting. That's produced by Maia Thomas. We've been candidly conversing with Luke Bo'sher today, the CEO of the Summer Foundation and one of DSC's founding members. If you want to learn a bit more about Summer, you can go to their website: summerfoundation.org.au and they really do have some of the best resources in the sector. Particularly for those of you who are supporting people to live independently. If you want to hear more from DSC, you can sign up to our newsletter, the link is in the show notes, or you can sign up at Disabilityservicesconsulting.com.au.

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