**Special Series: Living with COVID**

**Interview with anti-violence and disability advocate Anj Barker about her experience of catching COVID and being forced into hospital.**

**George Taleporos:** Hi and welcome to Reasonable and Necessary. Australia’s premier podcast series on everything you ever wanted to know about the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Brought to you by the Summer Foundation. I’m your host Dr George Taleporos and in this episode of our special COVID-19 series we talk to anti-violence advocate Anj Barker about her experience of catching COVID and being forced into hospital. Check it out.

**George Taleporos:** Hi Anj, welcome to the show.

**Anj Barker:** Hi George, pleasure to be speaking with you. Thanks for having me on.

**George Taleporos:** Great to have you on. Anj, you and I met about 15 years ago now and I know that you have done a lot of work since then, you’ve done a lot of work in the anti-violence area, you’ve been the Victorian Australian of the Year, you’ve done talks at schools and educated thousands of people about violence and I’m very privileged to have a chance to talk to you today and on this occasion it’s about COVID hey.

**Anj Barker:** Yes, unfortunately it is because I got COVID. I was at home in my apartment George, and I caught COVID off one of my night time staff who had contracted it from her sister’s husband.

**George Taleporos:** When you first contracted COVID, you were at home right? And it was a Tuesday morning, can you tell us what happened.

**Anj Barker:** It was very shocking and upsetting and I actually had a fill in support worker who heard the news with me and just left me, before my other worker had arrived, I was just left all on my own having just heard that I had contracted COVID, so I’m like freaking out and thinking ‘shit I’m gonna die.’ That’s sort of what the news I’ve heard on the TV had lead me to believe ‘cause I’ve got a weaker immune system.

**George Taleporos** – Yeah but luckily you didn’t die, you actually recovered quite well and that’s thanks to the fact that you’re double vaccinated right?

Yeah, absolutely.

I’m sorry that you had that experience where your support worker, basically, left you in the lurch, at a time of need, that’s not what we want is it?

**Anj Barker:** Yeah, and my apartment management kicked me out to hospital because of me needing my support workers, like, coming in and out of my apartment there was too high a risk and they might pass it on to the other residents at my apartment building.

**George Taleporos:** Oh, so you had to leave your apartment even though you felt ok, it sounds like you were told to leave by the Department of Health, is that right?

**Anj Barker:** Yes

**George Taleporos:** In order to get support because your support workers were going to have to come in and out of your apartment and it was considered unsafe, is that right?

**Anj Barker:** Yes absolutely, correct George.

**George Taleporos**: It doesn’t seem very fair does it, like other people get to stay home and recover in their own home but you had to be shipped off to hospital.

**Anj Barker:** Yeah and it made me feel more at risk because like there were other people sick with COVID in the hospital, so my illogical brain was in a panic station thinking I’m going to get it worse than I actually did.

**George Taleporos:** Yeah, I’m not surprised, I don’t like being around people who sneeze and cough. I don’t know how I would have coped in the hospital with more people who are very ill with COVID, I’m really glad that you weren’t very ill, but I’m not happy that you were forced to go to hospital. That's not really fair.

**Anj Barker:** I was thankfully, I was in my own private room with no one else. And that’s what saved my mental health anyway.

**George Taleporos:** Yeah, I can imagine that your mental health would have been quite under a lot of stress and also being alone, even though it’s good that you didn’t have to share a room, you had to be isolated on your own right.

**Anj Barker:** Yes, in a white room for 2 weeks with no television or radio. Thankfully my parents drove down and dropped off my iPad and a phone because actually what happened the day I got my test results back, it was like my phone got COVID because it stopped working.

**George Taleporos:** Wow your phone got covid and stopped working. Wow. But you got an iPad dropped off and another phone. Those were your only link to the outside world.

**Anj Barker:** Yes, that is true.

**George Taleporos:** Tell us a bit more about when you were in hospital and you had your iPad, you were all alone with no one to talk to. What did you do to pass the time?

**Anj Barker:** Oh, well actually it was awesome, because I took up doing sit ups, I built me some rock hard abs. For my 2 weeks in hospital all I did was sit ups. I did a 1000 every day at least.

**George Taleporos:** Wow, well done on that.

**Anj Barker:** Thank you.

**George Taleporos:** So 14 days later and you got to leave the hospital how did that feel?

**Anj Barker:** Oh like heaven. Well it was awesome. I was able to see people going about their lives, I was able to see the news, what had been going on. Catch up on all the goss.

**George Taleporos:** And how did you find the staff at the hospital? Did they look after you? I often worry about going into hospital and not being appropriately looked after.

**Anj Barker:** It was like, ’cause they had all these people, all the other people with COVID who were actually physically ill. Like they sort of just left me alone. All I did was lay in bed and they would just come in and do their tests every day and give me the blood thinning injection.

**George Taleporos:** And that’s because some people with COVID can get blood clots, is that right?

**Anj Barker:** This is correct George.

**George Taleporos:** Right, and you didn’t get blood clots because you were doing sit ups the whole time. I think you were probably the least at risk of blood clots of all.

**Anj Barker:** Yeah, well thankfully I didn’t suffer any blood clots or pressure sores or anything.

**George Taleporos:** Well that’s a relief.

**George Taleporos:** So what advice do you have to other people that might be listening in terms of what you have learnt from this experience?

**Anj Barker:** You just got to have faith in yourself, stay strong minded and just soldier on through it.

**George Taleporos:** Absolutely

**Anj Barker:** Nothing we can do in this life, we’ve just got to cope, any of the shit we get dealt.

**George Taleporos:** Yes and obviously get vaccinated because…

**Anj Barker:** Yeah, 100% everyone, everywhere needs to and should 100% get fully vaccinated please.

**George Taleporos:** Excellent advice. What then stood out for me when researching your experience was that you got COVID, your support worker gave you COVID, and your support worker got very ill. They weren’t vaccinated and you did very well apart from having a very boring time in hospital. And you were double vaccinated so, it shows us how important it is to get vaccinated, and it also tells us even if we are vaccinated, we can catch COVID, it does happen.

**Anj Barker:** I tested positive, sure, but I didn’t really actually suffer from contracting COVID at all. Like it started with a bit of a sore throat for like a day, maybe 2, and then bit of a sore belly and that might have been from all of my sit ups.

**George Taleporos:** Yeah who knows, it could have been your sit ups. Anj thank you so much for chatting to me today. I’m excited that I got to see you after all this time and your apartment looks really, really nice.

**Anj Barker:** Thank you very much George. It’s been wonderful to see you too because it has been what feels like forever especially because of all this COVID BS.

**George Taleporos:** Yes, hopefully we’ll see each other in person very soon. Thanks, Anj have a great day.

**Anj Barker:** Thanks George, Bye.

**George Taleporos:** Bye.

**George Taleporos:** That’s all we have time for on today’s episode of Reasonable and Necessary. Brought to you by the Summer Foundation. To be notified of future episodes, don’t forget to hit the subscribe button and the notification bell. Thanks for watching and until next time, stay well and reasonable.