##### **[00:00:07.050] - Carly Wallace**

Hi and welcome to Yarning Disability, the FPDN podcast. I'm your host, Bernard Namok, Jr. I'm a proud St. Paul Badu and Erubian man from the Torres Strait. And I'm also the son of the designer of the Torres Strait Islander flag, Bernard Namok, senior and an advocate for the First People's Disability Network. Join me now on Yarning Disability as we showcase First Nations people living with the disability, as well as their families and carers and other industry professionals.

##### **[00:00:44.750] - Carly Wallace**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that the following podcast may contain the voices and names of people who are deceased. The First People's Disability Network and the producers of this podcast recognize the traditional custodians of the land on which this podcast is recorded. They pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present, and the future. Leaders of tomorrow. FPDN would like to acknowledge our founding elders and their lasting legacy, uncle Lester Bustok and Auntie Gal Rankin and acknowledge all first peoples living with a disability.

##### **[00:01:30.030] - Aunty June R**iemer

We've kept that dream alive, we've kept that voice going. We never framed from the difficulties, and I think it's coming together. There's always going to be lots of work to be done.

##### **[00:01:43.040] - Bernard Namok**

That was the voice of Aunty June Reima, Deputy CEO of First People's Disability Network. Aunty June, a proud Gumbaynggirr and Dunghutti woman from the north coast of New South Wales, has been working in the sector for over 40 years, leading and inspiring her team as they navigate the changes in the national disability sector and was honoured for her life's work. Dedicated to creating systemic change to improve the lives of first peoples with disability and their families.

##### **[00:02:12.270] - Aunty June** Riemer

So my name is June Reima. I'm a Gumbaynggirr and Dunghutti woman from the north coast of New South Wales. Nambucca Heads regions so come from a long line of activists, the Foley family. My grandmother was a Foley, and I'm deputy CEO of First People's Disability Network, Australia.

##### **[00:02:31.190] - Bernard Namok**

What made you wanted to be a part of the disability movements?

##### **[00:02:34.790] - Aunty June R**iemer

Yes, so I've always been passionate about supporting families and mob. I guess it's how I grew up. I was the oldest granddaughter, so I was given the role of looking after all the other grandchildren and nieces and nephews. And I guess my family were always my aunties, my grandmother. We all cared and looked out for each other always. And we have family with disability, so it was just normalized that we all looked out for each other and cared for each other. So from an early age, I was just always being supported. It was just my role. And I think I was born that way, to look out and look after. I'm the oldest in my family too, so I had siblings underneath that I had to care for and support. And we were a close knit family, so the wider family, so we're always together and caring and looking out for each other. So when I left school, I went into nursing initially, and that was something I always wanted to do. It wasn't a job, it was just I enjoyed working with people. Some of my other jobs in my early years were working for therapy center, where I took care of children with profound disabilities and looked after them so their families could have respite.

##### **[00:04:15.090] - Aunty June** Riemer

And then I worked managing organizations where our work was to support people with disability and the age population. So I've always enjoyed all those roles. And I think when you see people being supported and can navigate systems, particularly for our mob that weren't designed for them, and move on with life, whether it's housing or getting knowledge around how to support their elderly family or their children with disability, I always feel quite chuffed about that. People can be educated and learn how to, as I said, navigate systems that were never designed for them. So I've always had a passion. I've always done this work. I don't know any other difference. I've been in the community care industry for over 40 years now, so it's just always been my life's work. And I cared for my own mother until she died a couple of years back, and I'd made a promise to her that I wouldn't put her into a facility and I cared for her at home, so it was just natural to do that and wasn't a chore. And we have family members with disabilities, as I said, and when we're out and about or whatever, you know, family gatherings, we we just always look after each other.

##### **[00:05:50.020] - Aunty June** Riemer

So it's just who I am as a person, I guess.

##### **[00:05:56.370] - Bernard Namok**

And we recently celebrated NAIDOC, which the theme is for the elders, especially within the FPDN movement, how important it is for, I guess, myself and a lot of us to know about the founding elders of this movement.

##### **[00:06:20.150] - Aunty June** Riemer

Yes. So I've been with FPDM for 13 years now, so I was very lucky from the early days. Even before I came to FPDN, I knew of Uncle Lester Bostock and the work that he'd done and the work he was doing at the time, again, building organizations, not for profit organizations to include people with disability. So it was a privilege when I came to FPDN to work alongside Uncle Lester. He was a visionary man and he was quietly spoken, and it was just so lovely to sit around and be in his audience and listen to the work that he'd done. And I take great solace from those times that we were able to just sit back and yarn and talk about. And he was a man living with disability himself, but he was always humble in everything he approached, but also mentored us to go those next steps constantly. And then I was lucky to travel with him. And then Annie Gail Renkin, NEMA jury woman from South Australia. She was formidable. I just loved Annie Gail. She never took no for an answer she was the Ying to Uncle Esther's Yang, so she was very outspoken.

##### **[00:07:51.090] - Aunty June** Riemer

But again, it was all on behalf of mob that didn't have choices in their life living with disability. She lived with a disability herself and always spoke up again. She supported her sister, who was profoundly disabled, even with her own disability. She made the point that her sister had the right supports in her life and for all the other mobs across nationally. As I said, I was lucky to travel with them on many occasions, outreach work and community work. But we also got to United Nations, and listening to them representing aboriginal Torres Strait on the people on that international level was a real privilege. And I'll never forget those days. There was hard work, but there was funny times, too. They both had an amazing sense of humor, and it's sad that they passed too soon, but their legacy lives on in FPDN. I think they would be so proud of where FPDN has come from. We were a really small organization for many, many years, but they never gave up. They mentored and tutored, and Damien, our CEO, as the leader of our organization, you know, is keeping their dream alive. And, you know, I think, you know, as we always acknowledge them in our meetings, they are the legacy of FPDN, and we'll never forget the work that they've done to make us a truly national representative body.

##### **[00:09:38.330] - Aunty June** Riemer

And it's come to fruition. So where we are today is all their legacy and amazing people, both of them. Like, I smile thinking of them, the times, the many good times and bad times we had together, but we always kept going forward. And I think that's what their narrative was. Let's keep going. Let's keep going.

##### **[00:10:03.010] - Bernard Namok**

Well, I think that's what kind of I got my next question lined up, and I think you answered a few of my next question is, like, growth in any organization is good, like, over your time with FPDN, and do you think that is there something that you're proud of? And do you think that we still have a long way to go?

##### **[00:10:34.570] - Aunty June** Riemer

There's many points along this journey that we can be proud of. For example, we held the only and there have been one since National Deadly Death Mob Conference that was held out in Penrith, New South Wales. And that was a gathering with all hearing impaired First Nations people. But we had the Maoris over, too. And that three day event really highlighted the significant challenges for our people living with hearing impairment. What we heard from many of them from their early days of education was they didn't know which box to tick. Is it do I tick the disability box and I might get supports, or do I tick the cultural aboriginal Torres Strait Islander box and I might get supports in that area? But we heard over and over again that they couldn't get both supports and be genuinely listened to in what their needs, you know, to fulfill, you know, education or employment avenues. So I think, you know, over the years the, the many gatherings that we've put together has highlighted the disadvantages for people living with many differences in our community. And I think that has been amazing work that FPDN has done, the policies we've written and with no staff or minimal staff, we've been keeping The Voice on the agenda for our mob with disability.

##### **[00:12:25.080] - Aunty June** Riemer

Yes, there's lots of work to be done, but I think the 20 years or 23 years now, it was originally adn in New South Wales and now FPDN as the national body. We've kept that dream alive, we've kept that voice going. We never framed from the difficulties and I think it's coming together. There's always going to be lots of work to be done, so much more people, you know, need supported and, you know, we acknowledge, you know, the isolation in many remote areas that people, you know, can't even get in the front door to a service. And so there's a lot of work to be done, but I think we're still tracking in the right direction. We're tracking up, we leveled out for a few years, I guess, and we have formidable teams now, amazing skill sets. Everyone comes from diverse backgrounds, but collectively we're moving forward and that's what enthuses me every day to get up and continue this journey of our elders.

##### **[00:13:38.070] - Bernard Namok**

And lately there's been a lot of news, especially on TV and radio, about The Voice campaign. What do you want people, especially with disability, to know about The Voice?

##### **[00:13:55.690] - Aunty June** Riemer

So I think this is an opportunity, it's the next phase for all our mobs to be recognized. That's all we're asking, that we have a seat at the table. The Voice is an opportunity not only to have our narrative included in the Constitution, but going forward, that table will mean representation of our mob with disability and that will come from local, regional and national level that we can keep moving that story through. That's what it's about. And as we all know, we're good storytellers and we like to yarn and that's what The Table will bring, an opportunity for us to yarn and review any policies or recommendations that government are doing. I know it's only a voice, we can't change the political system per se, but at least we'll be at the table. And that's how I look at it. If you're not at the table, you can't be heard. And that's all we're asking from the Australian community, to be heard and listened to. So there's many words that in traditional language that talk about that listening and hearing nara is one word, so we've always just asked to be heard. And I think this is the opportunity for us to collectively come together and share our culture, share our stories and share the disadvantage that happens across many communities.

##### **[00:15:49.700] - Aunty June** Riemer

Not just First Nations communities. So it's elevating that voice for all people with disability.

##### **[00:15:57.090] - Speaker 5**

And also, I think it's good to have a conversation going around. So issues like access and housing and health, and especially all the issues our family with disability are facing in remote communities can be heard and their voices can be heard too.

##### **[00:16:17.690] - Aunty June** Riemer

Yeah, that's what it's all about. We collectively hear each other. That's what about there's so much work to be done and it's an opportunity for everyone to come together, as you said, whether it's housing, whether it's justice, whatever it may be, to change systems to be more inclusive. That's all we're asking for at the end of the day. But unless we're heard about those systemic issues, things won't change. We've got to be listened to and share. It's just about sharing the solutions.

##### **[00:17:00.630] - Bernard Namok**

And also, your families are finding it tough, especially in regional and remote communities. Is there a way that they can kind of talk to or I guess point them into the right direction, especially if they want to talk to an advocate and other services in communities and remote towns?

##### **[00:17:22.750] - Aunty June** Riemer

Yeah. So FPDN is currently building our national advocacy program. We have advocates in New South Wales, and we have a small selection of advocates nationally, but we're building that program. So we hope to be this journey over the next year to have advocates in most jurisdictions across Australia so we can walk alongside our mob and hear them and hear what their dreams are and hear what their issues are to move forward. Not everyone wants the same story and not the same dreaming, but it's important that if we don't hear people, we can't change. So I think our advocacy is walking alongside First Nations people and creating safe places for them to share their stories. Advocacy from a First Nations perspective looks really different to mainstream because we're more a flexible workforce. We're happy to meet people at wherever their safe space is, whether it's under a tree or whether it's in a building. And that's the point of difference that FPDN offers in regards to supporting mob to get the best outcomes in whatever their needs may be.

##### **[00:19:01.870] - Speaker 5**

And sometimes mob just want to have a yarn?

##### **[00:19:03.810] - Aunty June** Riemer

A yarn to a yeah, that's the beauty. We understand that as First Nations people, that sometimes people, they don't want an outcome, they don't want a solution, they just want to talk through whatever's impacting them at that time, or just to yarn about the weather or their country. And that's what we do. Well, we're happy to sit back and be flexible, give that time, give that space and respect where people are coming from, whatever that yarn may be.

##### **[00:19:42.250] - Bernard Namok**

And lastly, I like to end things with a little reflection or to cheer somebody up. Is there a message that you have for mob kind of finding it tough or just want to I guess it'll get some uplifting and some encouragement is there anything that you want to yeah.

##### **[00:20:06.530] - Aunty June** Riemer

I think it's really important to people at the moment. Australia is going through a cris. We've seen a lot of disasters in the last time, floods and fires, and now we're going through a bit of a recession and cost of living is almost impossible. But I think in reflecting if we go back to the Depression or the other years that our elders collectively come together and shared, you know, whether it's sharing resources or, or sharing conversations, I think people need to reflect on that a bit more and don't be ashamed to talk about what's worrying in them. There's an additive that talks about a shared conversation is a good conversation. So I think we need to get back to where we used to be, you know, collectively as families and communities and and celebrate the small wins, whatever that may be. You know, we we always got to give time to celebrate, whatever it may look, even if you just got up in the morning and walked outside and enjoyed the fresh air or the rain, celebrate those small winds, because tomorrow is always another day. There's another day. And I think, you know, and if it means, you know, turning off the news and and and not hearing, you know, the daily updates, just do that, whatever works for you.

##### **[00:21:56.600] - Aunty June** Riemer

But, you know, I really encourage mobile ways to try and get out to the best of their ability. And if they can't get out, find someone that can support them to get out and about if they have accessibility needs and that because there is a lot out there. You just need to talk to people and share your concerns. If we don't know, we can't help. There's a lot of good people out there, whether they're paid or unpaid. There's a lot of mob out there doing really good stuff across the community and touch base with your elders being NADOC week. The elders have the answers. They've always been our backdrop to improve systems and move forward, but they also have time to listen to us and we need to celebrate that energy of our elders and their narratives and their spirituality. We need to get back to the old ways, I would say.

##### **[00:23:05.450] - Speaker 5**

And that was ANI June Reima a proud Gumbaynggirr and Dhungatti women from the north coast of New South Wales

##### **[00:23:19.870] - Bernard Namok**

Thanks for listening to Yarning Disability. FPDN would like to thank you for coming on this journey as each week we hear from first peoples living with a disability and shine a light on the issues they are facing. I'm your host, Bernard Namok Jr. Follow FPDN on our social media accounts to stay up to date with future episodes and information. You can also visit our website at www dot fpdn dot org.au