##### **[00:00:02.780] - Bernard Namok**

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. 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 a disability, as well as their families and carers and other industry professionals.

##### **[00:00:44.790] - 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 Bustock and Auntie Gale Rankin, and acknowledge all first peoples living with a disability.

##### **[00:01:28.700] - Bernard Namok**

And just a heads up, the following conversation may contain some course language. This episode of Yarning Disability features Nancy Bates, a barkindji woman from far western New South Wales, a senior advocate for FPDN, and an accomplished singer-songwriter. Nancy balances her advocacy work with the guitar and songwriting, and is involved with a project called Songs Inside, where she works with women inside Adelaide Women's Prison. Songs Inside is a transformative story of a group of women prisoners in a groundbreaking music program that aims to keep vulnerable women from returning back to the prison system.

##### **[00:02:20.450] - Nancy Bates**

My name is Nancy Bates and I'm a Barkindji woman from far west New South Wales. I grew up on country in a little town called Broken Hill. My dad is from Wilcannia and I have cultural ties to the area of Wilcannia all the way up to Cobar, actually. Wilcannia, Menindee, Broken Hill, all the way down to Deyre and the Darling. The country that either side of the Darling River, that's my country and my mob. I guess that's where I call home. Although I live on the country here in South Australia now and have done for nearly 20 years.

##### **[00:02:57.000] - Bernard Namok**

For mob that haven't been to your country, can you describe what your country are like?

##### **[00:03:05.040] - Nancy Bates**

Salt bush, red dirt, sunsets. The sky feels like you can touch it. It feels like it's just there. You know, and when you look at big open plains, you can see so far, that's so flat, you can actually see the curvature of the earth. You can see our mother's curves and birdlife. We have a river, so fresh water. We also have the Mindy lakes, which is a freshwater lake system that holds up to eight to ten times the water of Sydney Harbour. They're full at the moment, but we've had some problem with drought, so things can get dry and then things can be in flood. It's an extreme environment. But early morning sunsets on the river and the sound of bird-tongue and campfire and red dirt, black river mud and sand, too. We've got sand hills, big white sand hills as well. The sand out at Menindee lakes. It's pretty diverse country. It gets very hot in the summertime and it gets freezing cold in the wintertime as well. But to me, just like, I don't know, when I think about home, just the smell of that country. One of my favourite smells back home is when it's been dry and the rain comes and it hits that red dirt for the first time.

##### **[00:04:38.280] - Nancy Bates**

You just smell that beautiful, that beautiful smell. I think it's mostly we've got some hills that we've got some hills that we've got some ranges out there that connect to the country over in the Flinders Ranges as well. It's not just flat, it can be quite diverse and we've got some really special places as well. That's what home is like to me.

##### **[00:05:04.040] - Bernard Namok**

Sounds nice. Hopefully that I'll get to visit your country one day and see all those lovely things that you just described.

##### **[00:05:13.660] - Nancy Bates**

Well, I was... Because I grew up on the river, I don't know what sea fish is what fish, you know what I mean? I've always wanted to know, if we look at our yellow belly perch or the cod, they're just delicious, beautiful, delicate, fleshy white fish. I'd always like to do a comparison of saltwater, freshwater fish and see what the difference is. I haven't done, I haven't eaten a lot of seafood here.

##### **[00:05:47.890] - Bernard Namok**

Nancy, thank you for joining me on yarning disability. Can you tell me about your role just with FPDN and how long you've been involved?

##### **[00:05:58.540] - Nancy Bates**

Fpdn is like a family. I first heard about First People's Disablities Network about 8-10 years ago, I think it was around that time. I'm getting too old to remember exactly what year. But

##### **[00:06:14.190] - Nancy Bates**

At the time, I remember seeing an advertisement. I think it might have come through an email about a position for an Aboriginal local area coordinator role. I thought, Oh, what's that? Coordinator what? Doing what? Then I learned more about the NDIS that was rolling out. The rollout was beginning, and in South Australia, that was for kids. The role would be basically about supporting families and communities to access the NDIS or to make sure that the NDIS was a good fit and was being responsive to our people. Incredibly difficult times. It was pretty messy. I know there's still a lot of problems, but back then, there were so many unknowns. Anyhow, I applied for the job in a nutshell, I got the job and I was co-located in the NDIA office at St. Mary's in Adelaide. We had one little room off to the side and just kicked off from there and it was a small organization back then. I stayed in that role until the end of the contract and we grew the program over that time. We had Tara Wallace and Donna Fraser who came into the team as well and started doing more work, but then funding stopped.

##### **[00:07:33.010] - Nancy Bates**

Like a lot of good initiatives, often government just doesn't continue the funding for whatever reason. Then from that time, I was touring with Uncleshe wrote. I'm also a musician and a singer-songwriter, so I had a wonderful opportunity to be going, spend some time with him for about four years. Then about 18 months ago, I got a call from June. Every now and then, we would talk and she was like, Hey, Nancy, what are you doing? I've got jobs available. We're working on the Disability Royal Commission. It's really important work. I'd heard about it. I was listening on radio and social media, just keeping my eye on it. Of course, that piqued my interest. I applied for a role to become an indigenous community advocate for the Disability Royal Commission to help people in South Australia to tell their stories to the Disability Royal Commission. I've come back in. I'm visiting the family again. I'm back at the kitchen table. We've gone through that process. The work of gathering those stories has ended now, and now we wait for the recommendations. In transitioning away from the Disability Role Commission work, we're now undertaking a pilot program to become a nationally accredited to deliver advocacy as part of the National Disability Advocacy Program.

##### **[00:09:00.730] - Nancy Bates**

We're one of about five pilot sites who are launching with this new initiative. I guess this is about responding to some of the stories that we heard and the issues on the ground and being able to ensure that what people are going through in their own lives is fed up to statewide and federal governments, but also creates an opportunity for us to try and address issues within our community, with individual, family members. Then also we can also make sure that that speaks to the systemic advocacy that we do in the bigger work that we're trying to influence governments and organizations to change for services to be much more responsive to our people with disabilities. That's the ongoing work. We're building the advocacy program at the moment, we're building the team nationally, and we're about to head in to do some really important work and we're really building really strong foundations for this advocacy program, looking at how we really can culturally support not just the people in our communities and our people with disability, but also our workforce, our people that are working. Us working in the organization are often facing the same or similar issues to the people that we're assisting, or that we've had experiences in our lives that enable us to connect and understand and feel for what people are going through.

##### **[00:10:33.390] - Nancy Bates**

I think that gives us a lot of motivation. We have a lot of empathy. We feel for each other in this work. That's where we're heading towards. We're heading towards developing a best practice model of advocacy for our people with disability. It's pretty exciting times and there's a lot of work to do, but our teams are building and we're getting some really good people who are joining us at the table at FPDN.

##### **[00:11:00.840] - Bernard Namok**

Yeah, it's important work that the role for advocacy do for, I guess, for mob around the country. How do you switch off wearing that advocacy hat?

##### **[00:11:16.030] - Nancy Bates**

Well, sometimes you can't switch off and it's just about taking a breath in between days. But when I think about switching off or trying to balance things out, I've got my guitar, I've got my songwriting. I'm involved in another project at the moment. I'm working four days a week so that I can undertake another project called Songs Inside, where I'm working with women inside the Adelaide Women's Prison to write music and teach ukalele. We're heading into a big performance with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, September 29. This will become a documentary. It's a documentary project, which will be released in October next year, that will speak to the power of songwriting and music and connecting with women, doing time and giving women a voice. It's not just following me. This is primarily the documentary is really about women's experiences that what's led women into prison, and why does the prison system hold on to women? The recidivism rates of women in prison is just way too high. First Nations women are the fastest growing prison population here in South Australia, and that's got to be addressed. Then following following from the documentary, we'll be following up with a two-year social impact campaign to tour the film.

##### **[00:12:37.780] - Nancy Bates**

It'll be showing in places like Parliament House and universities and community settings. We will hope to do a screening across FPDN as well. Women who've got out will have the opportunity to do some public speaking and perform some music with me as we go out and talk about the film and really give voice to women who've had an experience of being incarcerated. Yeah.

##### **[00:13:05.120] - Bernard Namok**

It's pretty powerful when the women talk about the experience and their family. How do you feel when they tell that story?

##### **[00:13:20.620] - Nancy Bates**

Privileged, for starters, inspired. I feel stronger. I feel more passionate. I feel fire in my belly grows. It is distressing. The hardest bit is leaving women behind. I can come home and women are going through a lot. People, they're trying to navigate, keeping connected to their children. They're the strongest women I know, the most incredible women I know. I know some bloody incredible women. I just feel deeply and I feel compelled to do whatever I can, whatever I can until my last breath.

##### **[00:14:14.760] - Bernard Namok**

Yeah, and you can see it in their face too, when they talk about the experience. When they tell their story, it must be, Oh, yeah. Okay. The feedback that you receive from them, what is the feedback like from them telling their story?

##### **[00:14:41.690] - Nancy Bates**

Yeah, I think women do express a feeling of empowerment. They feel that they say things like, You make us feel human again. You make us feel like women, not prisoners not scumbags, not people who've done something so wrong that they deserve to be locked in a cage. You make us feel human and we reflect in each other. Like the stories that women tell or the similar of my own stories, I see that I could easily end up in prison. Any of us women could, through experiences of family and domestic violence, through addiction that might come from trauma. When you've got groups of women talking about every woman in the group having a story of abuse and violence in their life as children or as adults or as both, it's pretty clear here what the real problem is, and it's not those women. I remember when we revealed, and you'll see this in a documentary. When we recruited the women, we didn't tell them they were going to perform with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. I waited for about four weeks and we got into the swing of things. Then I remember coming along and going, Right, I've got some news for you today.

##### **[00:16:10.720] - Nancy Bates**

Here, sit down. I said, We've been writing some music and we're doing great. But I've got to tell you, we've got a performance outcome on September 29. We're going to be performing with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. If I could just have the expressions and the faces of those women, it's just like a mixture of excitement and fear and absolute just disbelief at this opportunity that they're going to perform with a symphony orchestra inside the presence. It's never been done before. Then when I took in, so we've been working with a musician called Julian Ferreireto, and he's like the person that bridges the communication between our music group and the symphony orchestra. He's taken our songs and arranged them for the orchestra performance. I remember he gave me the first song that he arranged, and I took it into the class to play to the women. It's a song called Freedom. It's a song that came about after a conversation about what does freedom mean when you're a woman doing time? What is freedom? Anyhow, when I played that, the women, just the looks on women's faces and tears and laughter and just the power of seeing something you've written, interpreted by an orchestra coming back to you in that way, it's pretty enormous.

##### **[00:17:49.820] - Nancy Bates**

I feel like women have had a major shift in the group. There's lots of stuff going on internally inside the prison. There's lots of just day-to-day stuff that I can't impact on. And women may not be friends outside of the group or spend a lot of time. But when we're in that room together, we are a team and we are a family and we are there to support each other. We are heading towards doing something so powerful together that it's going to change. It's going to change Australia and change people's thinking about our women and what it means to end up inside a prison and why that happens, because society has so much responsibility to take. Governments, communities, all Australians have responsibility to take for the current state of incarceration of our people. Because we are not innately violent, wrong or bad. We are strong, beautiful, powerful people. It's the system that incarcerates us, not us, largely. That's what I see.

##### **[00:18:55.790] - Bernard Namok**

How can us mob support this project? Yeah.

##### **[00:19:00.960] - Nancy Bates**

You can go to the Documentary Australia website, Songs Inside. We're still raising some money. We're just a bit short on budget at the moment, so people contribute that way. People could just keep an eye out for the project. There's a Facebook, there are social media, hashtag SONGs INSIDE. There's a Facebook and an Instagram account as well. We're updating on that, just letting people know we were out in the program. The come and see the film when you're and it's released and if it's coming to your town, come and see if you've got an opportunity to view it. If you're working in an organization, please invite us to come along and screen the film with your staff and community members that you work with. Let's just grow this conversation and amplify these voices in whatever way that we can. That's ways that people can support this process. Also, we are looking for partners once the film is released and it has been through cinemas and we start our social impact campaign. If there's organizations, people out there listening, who are interested, get in touch with us. Because we're looking for partners within the work to really create as much change and for this to be as impactful as possible, and that means that we're going to need people to join their hearts and minds and hands in this work as we need to make this a priority.

##### **[00:20:27.560] - Nancy Bates**

I know we've got lots of competing priorities, but this must be up there.

##### **[00:20:31.460] - Bernard Namok**

How many women are involved in this project?

##### **[00:20:36.480] - Nancy Bates**

Originally, it was going to be a group of 10, just me. But then we did a couple of information sessions, took in big bags of popcorn, and we went in and showed the Songs Inside trailer, the teaser that you've seen, the three-minute, which that paints a picture of what the documentary would be about. We had an overwhelming response of women. We then had to interview women. I remember we got to ten, but then a young woman came back to me. She said, I've been in prison in and out for a number of years. I've got three kids. I was in a domestic violence relationship since I was 14, 15. She goes, I really do think this is a thing that can help me. I'm representing other Nanga girls here. How could I say no to that? You can't say to that. I've stretched. We've got 12 women in the project and 12 incredible women.

##### **[00:21:39.600] - Bernard Namok**

I can't wait to see the film when it's going to be released and… If any of our mob are struggling or going through a difficult situation in their life, what advice would you say to them?

##### **[00:21:58.110] - Nancy Bates**

Well, the first thing is like, be kind to yourself because it's often the voice inside our own head that's the hardest to stop or change. Circles of care, where can you go where you feel held and nurtured and loved? Is that family? Is that family? Is that countries? Is it all of those things? Is it a walk on the beach? When things get hard, you have to reach out. Because other people generally, we hide it, right? We hide it from each other. People can think that you're doing really, really well because you're doing all this work or they see you on social media with a happy smile and having a nice lunch or something. But underneath that, there's this undercurrent in our lives. Our lives are difficult because we've inherited this colony and also just been to each other. I find natural violence really hard to deal with in the community. When the hurt comes from within your own mob or your own communities, that can be difficult. But continuing to speak up and name it and not tolerate that, just zero tolerance for that behavior is really important as well. Boundaries, setting boundaries where you need to take in some time out.

##### **[00:23:24.600] - Nancy Bates**

Sometimes I take some time out from family and community because I need that. That's not because I don't love my people and community, it's just I need… There's a lot. There's a lot of responsibility that we carry. Everybody at FPDN carries responsibility and cultural obligation, and that's difficult as well. I think first start with yourself. See if you can be a bit kinder to yourself if you're not feeling so great. If that doesn't work, I know there's times when I can't be kind to myself, I go to people who can be kind to me and remind me that I am worth something, that I am a valued member of the community, that what I do and who I am is important to them. Because sometimes we think, I think we lose track of that sometimes around, especially when there's a voice in your own head telling you you're not good enough, you're not doing enough, all of that stuff. So yeah, start with self-care first. Then if that doesn't work, reach out and keep talking to people and get that support until that negative voice stops or at least turn down the dial, whatever you can do, go fishing, grab a ukulele, grab a guitar, go and write a song, write a silly song.

##### **[00:24:43.670] - Bernard Namok**

Because you never know. It might be a number one hit, but what I do to switch off, if things become too much for me, I get a bag of prawns. I go along the Coast, up the Coast of Port Douglas, I find a secluded beach. I sit down with my headphones, I peel that Prawn, and I eat it. That's how I switch off.

##### **[00:25:13.450] - Nancy Bates**

I think that's going to be a documentary—I've got to be a documentary. I've got to see that Prawn being peeled. That sounds really… Well, maybe the difference would be maybe I could go down the river and catch the yabbies, crack open those shells and have a good feed.

##### **[00:25:27.880] - Bernard Namok**

Yeah, switch off, sit and think. That's what I do, just to switch off. I like to encourage a lot of mob to do the same. Find how you want to switch off and relax.

##### **[00:25:41.880] - Nancy Bates**

Don't feel guilty about relaxing and switching off. There's times when just recently I just had some commitments and I just had to go, You know what? I can't do that. I'm not okay at the moment. I'm just going to take this weekend to time out for myself. You know what? When you put your needs forward to your friends and your family, your community, almost always they will be understanding, much more understanding than what you think they might be in taking that time out and caring for yourself. Often, for me, I find sometimes I'm my own worst enemy. I just want to put it out there to just be kind, to yourself, be compassionate, give yourself a break, and take it away.

##### **[00:26:30.800] - Bernard Namok**

The trailer for songs inside, I had to listen to it. It's very powerful, touching, and real. Can you describe in your own words about that?

##### **[00:26:46.880] - Nancy Bates**

Yeah, I just feel it's deep and revealing. It feels like truth-telling from the voices of people who are experiencing incarceration, and their voice should be the most amplified voice in this space. When we talk about incarceration, then we need to give voice to people who've had an experience of that, not just speak for people that's not right. I feel like words to describe this will be inspiring, revealing. There's honesty. I think the last word I can think of is authentic. Yeah, that's how I'd describe it. It's real. It's the realest thing I've ever done. I mean, the other thing about in terms of doing this type of work, in case of the prison system, this is another way how we constantly maneuver to connect with our people.

##### **[00:27:56.080] - Nancy Bates**

I have found music the best way to reach women in a prison system. It's allowed me to come in. If I had tried to combat this system head-on, within a role, within the service itself, I don't think I could get anywhere near as far as what I've got in terms of influence and change. My dream, my absolute dream, Bernard, is to see music programs in every prison to ensure that our people's experiences is documented through songwriting, through truth telling and narratives, woven into beautiful songs. When we're in that room together and we're making music, and I think this is why I feel compelled to keep going back in, is when we are making that music, when we are singing together, when we are singing together, there are no walls and there is no barbed wire and there is no prison that could take away the freedom that we create together as women and as SONG women in that space. That's what I think it is for me.

##### **[00:29:15.030] - Bernard Namok**

I had a similar experience in Darwin when I was working up there in the radio. We went to the Berrimah Prison and we did workshop for broadcasting and that's enabled them mob, like them, fella's inside to do a radio package. That way they have messages out to send out to families that are in their communities. I think seeing them, when you mentioned that, you brought me back to that time there in Darwin when we used to go and do workshop with radio broadcasting in Berrimah. Just seeing them follow their face. You can't really get that out of your head aye because it's something that they look forward to and it's a way for them to make sure that their voice can be heard back to their community too.

##### **[00:30:20.290] - Nancy Bates**

Yeah, it's really powerful. When you think women are going to reconnect with family when they're out and they're reconnecting with their children and the families. Now they've got an instrument and now they've got music to teach their children. When there's family gatherings, they can pick up an instrument and lead their family and song. It's the ongoing impact as well. I agree with you, the power of what this creates, the dialog. It does create that too, way, when women are ringing up, telling their families, I'm going to be performing with a symphony orchestra. That ripples through. There's one woman in the program who hadn't spoken to her mother for a number of years. She threw drug addiction and ended up being incarcerated. That relationship was severed. But through this program, she called her mum and said, Hey, Mum, I know we haven't spoken for a while, but I really want to work out our relationship. I want to tell you I'm doing well. I'm in a music program. I'm going to perform with the Adelaide Civic Fee Orchestra on September 29th. Mum's coming in to see this. We have family coming in who will be part of witnessing this performance.

##### **[00:31:36.770] - Nancy Bates**

What that gives back to family is it reaffirms for them that that woman, that woman who's maybe done some things that she's not proud of or gone down the track that's not been healthy for her or for family, for a whole range of things. It's redemption. It's family saying, Yes, this is our family member and they're coming home and they're doing well. It gives family hopes as well, because they just want to see change. They want better outcomes. Almost everybody that goes in the prison is going to come out. You want, unfortunately, it's not the current, the way that it is now, but you want to hope there's some positive that comes out of it. Sometimes that is about these, when women are involved and have committed themselves to programs with these big outcomes, it completely reframes the way that they're seen within their own families and communities again. It reframes them in a very positive way and it allows people to feel confident and embracing that person again.

##### **[00:32:54.320] - Bernard Namok**

Them women, are they from like singing or a musical background or that's their first time giving it a go?

##### **[00:33:01.790] - Nancy Bates**

Yeah, first time. There's a couple that might have had a couple of lessons as children in school, but pretty much, yeah, ground zero. We're working from ground zero. I can't even begin. There's not a word. If there's a word bigger than pride or proud or proudness, whatever that is, it's just the sun doesn't shine as bright as what those women do in this room when we're making music together.

##### **[00:33:35.470] - Songs Inside Trailer**

Definitely better than being in prison. I feel like I've still got one foot in my old life and I've got one foot in my new life because there's still a possibility that I can be thrown back to where I was. But at the same time, I'm doing better and I'm not taking drugs. I feel like I really just want to move forward now and just leave it behind. But I can't. I feel connected to women in a prison system because I see myself in them. Like one sliding door moment can completely upheave with your life and you find yourself in a place that's going to strip you back to nothing. I'm just trying to get you to sing. You're basically taking her to put your whole finger over the whole floor.

##### **[00:34:19.650] - Songs Inside Trailer**

One, two. There's a disciplined component of this. You have to commit yourself to learn an instrument. But on the other side of that is a song and it's so worth it. I'm the light here where we are. The days are getting longer. This jail has become my hell. There's nothing left to save me. Only time can help. They took my children from me. Just from that one mistake, I'm in here and I've been in here ever since. Everyone has managed to find a G. A G spot. A G spot. I love it. Hello, my baby. Are you now I'm going to sing to you? Shut up. Don't make me nervous. For years, I've done nothing to self-destruct and hurt myself and blame and punish myself. I didn't have anything to do with my music for 15 years, 17 years. Ironically, here in jail, I found itsounds like a lullaby or something. I had this idea about writing a lullaby. Wouldn't it be nice to write a song for a baby to put them to sleep? I'd like to introduce Adelaide Women's Presence Songbird. I've just been approved for parole, so I'm getting out. I think, Am I going to do wrong?

##### **[00:36:01.590] - Songs Inside Trailer**

Am I going to fuck up? Am I going to be enough? Am I enough? It's beautiful.

##### **[00:36:15.730] - Bernard Namok**

Songs inside is a film of hope and. That shows we all deserve a second chance in life. That was Barkandji woman Nancy Bates, an advocate and a singer-songwriter. You can check out her story, music and videos at nancybates. Com. The links for Song Inside will be posted on our social media account. Thanks for listening to another episode of Yarning Disability. If there was anything you heard on today's episode that raises concerns for you, there is help available. You can contact 1-3 Yarn on 1392. 76 or be on Blue on 1-300-224-636 on Lifeline on 1-3-111.4. Don't forget to follow F. P. D. N. On our social media accounts to stay up to date with future episodes and information. You can also visit our website at www.fpdn.org.au. See you next time.