##### A **[00:00:02.780] - 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. I'm also the son of the designer of the Taurus 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.

##### **[00:00:45.460] - 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 Peoples 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 Gayle Rankin, and acknowledge all first peoples living with a disability.

##### **[00:01:27.470] - Bernard Namok**

Just off the tip of Cape York Peninsula in Far North Queensland, is the beautiful Thursday island, known to locals as Waibene or simply TI, it is home to about 2,805 people, and the main language spoken on the island is Torres Strait Creole. The Kaurareg People are the traditional owners of Thursday Island and the inner islands. Guess what? You can walk around the island in just under an hour. TI is known for its tropical climate. However, families with disability can feel the remoteness and the difficulties with accessibility is one of the big issues I'm more about facing in the Torres Strait Islands. The closest big city to Thursey Island is Cairnes, just 805 km away. In this episode of Yarning Disability, you will hear from a traditional Torres Strait woman, Aunty Abigail Harry, from Iama community of the Kulkalgal Nation. She's a mother, carer, and a community member living in Tamwoy Town suburb on Thursday Island. Aunty Abigail strongly believe that there is a greater need for family living across the Torres Strait Islands.

##### **[00:02:54.760] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

My name is Abigail Harry. I'm a native traditional Torres Strait Island woman. I'm from Iama, Kulkalgal nations. And I've worked for government for over 40 years. Lived in Noongar, Boodja, Yamatji, Wongi country for over 40 years. And now I'm back home in the Torres Strait to help my people.

##### **[00:03:28.330] - Bernard Namok**

And can you tell us what do you do now back home here in the Torres Strait?

##### **[00:03:35.660] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Well, my role, I'm still helping communities, families, friends, still do advocacy role, dialog for community meetings, government meetings, community meetings, play a big role in children with disability, mainly with children with disability, especially when it comes to education and employment and training.

##### **[00:04:02.050] - Bernard Namok**

How did you have the realization that there is a need for support for people with disability, especially you're on top with the region? Do you think that you could... You think that you got the need for support, up here?

##### **[00:04:19.170] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Well, I'm not going to say I think. I firmly and strongly believe that there is a greater need here in the tourist right, especially that we're living in a very isolated, indigenous, remote communities. There are 17 islands, 16 islands in the Torres Strait and here in the Kaiwalagal region as well. Because when you look at children or people with disability across in the Torres Strait, I think we as indigenous people living in remote indigenous community, we are the most disadvantaged people because of accessing services in the community. And it's very hard. It's not like you can walk into an agency or a government department or organization or a semi-government organization, and you can address any needs across the board. Because up here, it takes a long time to reach services and services like you're talking about services in Cairns and in Brisbane and not in the Torres Strait.

##### **[00:05:20.450] - Bernard Namok**

Do you think families the on top you know about what services for the people and what do they do?

##### **[00:05:31.090] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

No, I don't think there's a great promotion. I don't think there's an awareness because I think it's lack of resources, lack of funding, lack of the right people to go out to deliver that information, to filter the information to the community. You need to get the information to the communities or the communities aware of what's happening in any of the services providers because it's very hard. We're stillWe're not living in a third world country. This is a common world country, and we really need to get our people to skill our people so that we have our own people to work with our people. Usually when the people come this in, they usually... I'm not going to be disrespectful or anything. They're non-indigenous people. They don't know how to communicate with the people because the culture is very important to the people. You have to know how to speak to your people to have that understanding. And before you could create that awareness, what is doable, it's workable. But a lot of times they come in, it's workable and it's not doable. They come in with the project, but they don't know what to do with the people and the project because there's still that lack of understanding with our own people.

##### **[00:06:57.330] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Very, very hard, very difficult.

##### **[00:06:59.500] - Bernard Namok**

And it's more difficult, too, when you go out to the other islands because of the remotelyness of accessibility. Families are struggling more than here on TI.

##### **[00:07:15.730] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Well, Thursday Island is the main administration with government departments, semi-government organization. This is a senior bureaucratic organization here with this, this, the establishment here with this, this, Thursday Island. And when you go to the outer Torres Strait, for them to access not only disability, any specialist services hospitals, you have to come back here to the Thursday Island. And a lot of our people, mainly it was for our people with disability, because when they leave the tourist train to come in here, sometimes when they come in, it's a hard pay week. And I'm going to say that, and I want people to understand how difficult it is. Most of our people living up here with disability, pensioners, everybody a recipient of Centre Link. How are you going to look for how are you going to create position up here? Because positions, jobs are all taken. People from outside coming in and secure every job. They come and they take everything and they don't deposit anything back. When I'm talking about depositing something back into the community, I'm talking about helping the people in the community of the very most disadvantaged of the vulnerable people.

##### **[00:08:29.250] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

You can't go and design a policy and bring the policy come and wear the policy on indigenous people. No, it doesn't work like that. You've got to work with the people to understand what the people want and what the people needs are. Then you're going to know how to work with the people.

##### **[00:08:51.990] - Bernard Namok**

And also have understanding about one of the services you do, for example, like NDIS. I think he need more understanding, families need more understanding about NDIS and other services up here.

##### **[00:09:12.950] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Well, I'm going to talk from indigenous perspective. I'm talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, first nations people that are living in a very remote community, isolated communities, I'm talking about. If you to come to provide the service like that, anybody to come in, if they come to provide the service in the community, they have to make sure and ensure that they explain it and break it down to the people. You can't come with a structured policy and expect the people to understand what service you deliver and what benefits there are for them, because they still don't understand. You've got to come back to your people. You've got to come back to whoever the people that's in the community, your elders, your leaders, the community people, and talk to them and to have the basic understanding of what the people want in the community. Because if you come in with the policy and try to put a policy on them and explain it from a policy perspective, they will not understand. You can explain it to them and you go and they'll forget. They don't even know what you're talking about. You can come back again and explain it again and again and again.

##### **[00:10:29.290] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

So how do you make it work? You have to have the right people, on-ground people, the people that are going to deliver at a local level, at a grassroot level. You can take something from up the top, like middle management and government policies, and come and put it on to the people. No, it doesn't work like that. And because when you do policy, you have to be mindful of the two nations people again, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait people, like we learned from yesterday, and not only from yesterday, from before, like during my time when I'm in Aboriginal country, I can't speak for Aboriginal people, but I build a relationship with them and I can work with them because of the commonality we have, because everything is the similarities. But for our people, when you go to somebody else's country, you can't speak on somebody else's country. This is the thing that we have as a nations of people that we understand one another. If you come from outside as a non-indigenous people and you want to see what things that we're doing in our community, how we execute our own cultural science in our community, they would not understand that if you're from another country, you can't talk in this country.

##### **[00:11:40.730] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

For them, they think they have the right to speak. No, you can't. So this is the thing that from time and time and again, when I was working with governments, we talked about Aboriginal tourist right out on the people, and we're talking about disability. Not only about disability, we talk about NDIES, we talk about every other services that are across national, we talkout national programs, the designing and the methodology of the program, whoever's going to design it, they have to know that we are two separate people, two first nations people, very unique, very separate people, different customs, different culture, different belief, different heritage altogether. It's very different. So if you're going to create a model for the two nations people, you have to create one for the Aboriginal people, and you've got to create the other one for the total straight-out-bound people. And you have to have that voice for the two nations people around the table. You can't take a program, a national program, and thinking that it can fit two people, that dress one size fits all. No, it doesn't. Because of the lifestyle, because of the environment. When you look at the geopolitical tourist trade, it's very different.

##### **[00:13:00.020] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

That daughter one came yesterday and she experienced it. She knew that she was in somebody else's country.

##### **[00:13:07.430] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

She knew.

##### **[00:13:08.030] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

That she wasn't back from home in Western Australia. Because you know your place. We as indigenous people, we know. That's why we have that respect. We honor one another and we have that respect and we acknowledge this. When you're in somebody else's country, you know how you walk, you know how you talk. Everything is line upon line and precept upon precept. A yes is a yes and a no is a no. That's why when we design document, that document, it's got to be suitable for the two nations people.

##### **[00:13:38.740] - Bernard Namok**

When you look at... Because this topic here about accessibility and especially living remote, the remotelyness is like we experience the remotelyness here and stuff like some of them islands, they are Pugets, services, and you get accessibility for families that come in and out, but you go for some places, you don't got accessibility for family, especially like Ugar, in the Eastern Islands. So that's then again, a disadvantage when you come for health, especially accessibility and people with disability.

##### **[00:14:23.590] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

My boy, I'm glad you're saying that because you're nobody. You have to live in the region. You have to live on your island to be able to experience the hardship, the disability, getting from one island to another island. It's so expensive for people to travel. It's cheaper to go to Bali than it is to fly from here to Mer and to Ugar and to Darnley. The furthest of the east, to the ends of the earth I'm talking about. That's the furthest east. But when you look at how... They lived on Stephen Island and I think 10 years they went without a shop. And they have to travel by Dinghy every day to go to Darnley or go down to Yorke for the goods, whatever goods and services they want. You would not find that in Australia. That's why I'm saying this is not a third world country. This is Australia. This is a Commonwealth country. But when you talk about isolation and people that are living in a very remote, isolated indigenous community, they're the most disadvantaged. For them to travel from island to island because it's so expensive to go by plane, they have to go by Dinghy.

##### **[00:15:43.820] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

And we know what happens in between because the waters, nobody knows anything about the wind and the tide and the rain and the sea. It's the very stretchers water for Torres Strait and the people. They don't even know how people live out there with disability.

##### **[00:15:59.320] - Bernard Namok**

And especially families, we put them for life on the line because to access basic service and to get food so that people can live.

##### **[00:16:11.590] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

I don't know how. We need to have the services out with the islands. We know we've got those 16 islands in the Torres Strait, but we need to work very closely with the leaders, with the government, both local government, state government and communal government, and for them to understand, to have some form of understanding how people live. I think if you live like... Especially when you're talking about Cairns, if you live in Cairns and people with disability can still have access to everything to services because most of the service is not here. The services is not here. The services is in Cairns and all along, I don't know whether it's Townsville or Mackay and Brisbane, not up in the Torres Strait. If anybody wants to have services in the Torres Strait, first step, let's take, for instance, for the basic, and I'm talking about electricity, let's go back to electricity, like they have a card. They use a card system out on the island. They pay the electricity and they use that. But when you look at emergency relief funding here in the Torres Strait, especially for children, again, mothers with disability, children that are disadvantaged going to school.

##### **[00:17:52.220] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

To get the emergency relief funds, what they have to do is, and I'm talking about this card now. Let alone all every other services that linked into it. If anybody want help with the services up here for the emergency card relieved, like how it gets approved or how it gets granted, that phone call is to go through an organization here to go to, I don't know, Salvation Army or something in Cans, and you have to wait for that to be approved to come back up here before they can have access to that card to have that emergency fund release. Those are the things that we're talking about. You can't go to a food bank. There's no food bank here. You can't go to a second-hand shop and buy clothes for your kids from second-hand shop to go to school. You can't go. There's nothing. Total nothing. Zero. So how do you do it? How does the government work with people? You've got the ferry service running here. But when you look people like, well, I have a disability, but when we talk about children with disability or children that mothers with babies or mothers pregnant or sick people, you don't have the proper accessibility for transportation, for the ferry, for the bus.

##### **[00:19:18.810] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Even on the island, we don't have taxi services for, well, we have few busses running around for the hospital and for the children at Malawars, children with disability. But apart from that, if myself or anybody wants to go, my God, there's nothing. We've been requesting, let me say this, we've been requesting a bus for the last, I've been here 20 years, for the last 10 years. We want a bus to service the community. We're still waiting for a bus. The government said, Yes, every time, Premier and cabinet, Prime Minister and cabinet, we want a bus. We want a bus for the... Today we still don't have a bus, a community bus runs by community, not by non-indigenous people or owns business up here. By community. The service providers, it must be the community people.

##### **[00:20:15.550] - Bernard Namok**

Do you think the leaders and government people push aside people, issues for people with disability, especially because it's in that too hard basket to deal with?

##### **[00:20:35.450] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

I think they do, and I hope they're all going to listen to it. Praise God. Thank you, Lord. Now try to be diplomatic and be a little bit...

##### **[00:20:47.360] - Bernard Namok**

I think they try to push it away because it's in that too hard basket to fix for because of the remotelyness. But we're living in Australia in 2023, country and it shouldn't be hard to access basic needs for people with disability.

##### **[00:21:07.160] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

They're not listening. Nobody is listening. The leaders are not listening. The government are not listening. I tell them the last time that they were up here. Torres Strait shares a foreign border. Torres Strait is the only nation that shares a foreign border with a foreign nation. And it's a government document, it's written by government. And in bracket, it's a PNG. But for us, we have a relationship because of treaty. That's another separate issue altogether. But one of the things I would want to say is that because the government of the day and the leadership of the day, they come to the people and they ask the people, talk to the people, and they come up all the time. They get their money, they come up here. Prime Minister and cabinet, premier cabinet, ministers, state ministers been coming up after, premier cabinet, still talk and it's the same issues. Same issues are going around the table: high cost of living, housing, education, employment. And those are the things that are affected into the way we live, whether it's disability, whether it's disadvantaged because of housing situation, high cost of living. You look at people on the island with gas bottle that's got children with disability, babies, pregnant women, elders, They have a gas in their homes.

##### **[00:22:47.470] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Most of the homes, they use a gas stove, and it's not gas that underground. It's not gas where you go and turn it on and then you come, you can just light the stove or turn the... It's a hot water system for the kids now. They buy the gas bottle and it's about $400 for one bottle. Now, how do you think people living in Australia connecting a small gas bottle that you put onto the barbecue, connected in for the big stove in the house, mind you. We don't live like that in Australia. We have to live. We must have the same socio economic advancement like all Australians and other Australians and all Australians and all Australians. You can't just look at Torres Strait and thinking that it is a third world country. It's not. It's a commonwealth country. But how do we come to the table and how do we talk about it? Maybe with the yes vote, that would make a difference. With government sitting and come to the table. Now, no more. Let's do a deal, a real deal, not a raw deal. Let's talk about the basic fundamental issues that are affecting our people today and how are we going to help our people in the community?

##### **[00:24:17.630] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Create more job opportunities in employment. Study program, apprenticeship program, take our children from the Torres Strait to go and work in like they did in the 80s, in the 70s. And I'm going to acknowledge the families and honor to acknowledge the family and respect. Let's look at the late Charles Perkin that I've worked with for many years, the late Jack Davis. I mean, those were the leaders of the 70s, and children were going from here, from Torres Strait to go and work in Canberra. We don't have that in place anymore. Look at all the opportunities that we have, indigenous people have. Like after school program, ASPA, everything's gone, taken away from us. When we put something into place that it's workable, no, it's not doable. They come and undo it because it's something that I believe it's going to benefit the indigenous people. And we have to rise in this nation. We have to have the same opportunity like everybody else in this country. Oh, I tell you, my son, for the 20 years I've been back here after living down Saturday, I could go to any government department or any agencies or any organization.

##### **[00:25:39.840] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

I'm able to help anybody. I can go and sit on any panel. But up here you can't access anything.

##### **[00:25:46.630] - Bernard Namok**

Why do you think it's hard up here, especially to talk about issues or to get leaders to listen?

##### **[00:25:59.050] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Well, my people in the tourist road, they know. I always say it when I go to meeting. I learned, I groomed my knowledge because I lived in Noonga, Boodja, Yamatji and Wongi country, Aboriginal country, and I traveled respective state and territory, and I've worked with indigenous people, and that's what made me who I am today. I'm a very strong indigenous woman, first nation woman, and I'll stand up and I'll fight for the right of my people. If it's right, yes, it's right. Let me stand on it. If it's a yes, it's a yes. If it's a no, it's a no. And I stand for correction. But I believe that up here in this time and this season, because we have been so much in subordination, it's always been... I go to meetings and I'm listening that people talk about, Well, we have to do what government wants. I've never heard that before. What do we have to do what government want? No, we don't have to do what government want. We have to tell the government what we want, what is better for the betterment of our own people. Not because what they want because it's their programs and it's their money, no.

##### **[00:27:12.090] - Bernard Namok**

You've got to work for the people. Program is got to work for the people. And you can't have somebody from down south not knowing how we live here to tell us how to run because that's not how it works.

##### **[00:27:27.360] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

No, it doesn't work like that. It will never work. They will still try to understand indigenous people, because I've always said to my people and I said to government, today we are the commodities. Because the land and the sea is ours, we have a Biblical tie to the land and to the sea by blood covenant, by God. If God cuts a covenant with Israel, He cuts a covenant with his people. And that biological tie, the bloodline, is to the land because it's house. But we're walking around like if we don't own it. Of course, we want to share with everybody else, but let's all work together, come to the table and let's talk about a good deal, a new deal, a new arrangement. I'm not going to come and say that, No, because... And it happens here. It happens here. More so at the hospital, more so at the school. I see it happen and it sickenes me in sight. I don't know, there's nothing that I can do. I can talk and talk and talk, and I can talk to communities and I can talk to families. But how do we do it? We've got to sit down and run the table again with the leaders, with the government, and look, let's just talk about this thing properly, because we are the people in the community, we suffer.

##### **[00:28:50.450] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

We're really suffering. And I don't think because this insubordination where... I don't want to sound like I'm going to be a little bit sarcastic, because I try to be diplomatic and I don't want to sound like I'm racist because I'm not. Because I lived with Aboriginal people. I saw the struggle, the other part of the struggle, the later part. The latter reign of Aboriginal people, the struggle was... You can never describe that. But when you talk about the former things, the former reign, the new reign, the new seed, that new crop that you're going to plant, we're going to change the tank of the non-indigenous people to come to the table because they still don't know the history about people. And that's why there's that them and us. It's not about them and us or we and them. It's about a nation of people. Because Australia is a nation of people and you can't separate that. But they must understand there is a first nation of people because it's historical. There's a history and you can't forget that history.

##### **[00:30:14.290] - Bernard Namok**

Okay, so moving forward, what would you like to see, especially for people with disability, to happen? I mean, families are being frustrated because nobody listening and everybody... The conversations are going around because people are coming to positions with them issues that we talked about 20 years ago and new people are coming to positions and the same issues is still happening and still being discussions is still happening. I think people are frustrated because by sounding repetitive and nothing is being done just for the basic human rights for people with disability, because everybody deserves to live in a happy and safe environment.

##### **[00:31:09.290] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Thank you, Lord. When we talk about basic human rights, the fundamental basic rights of we as a human beings and we as a people, it's something that I struggle with it, because to work with remote indigenous community, we talk about NDIS and we talk about disability. You must come to work with the people with the love and the compassion and understanding and a sabe sabe (know know), and they know the people and know the culture. I see a lot of people come in, and to me, I see a lot of non-indigenous people coming in, working with our people, wearing the T-shirt with all kinds of design on it, Aboriginal colors, Torres Strait Island colors, and the lion of Judah, rose inside of my belly. Now, if you come in and you're wearing something like that and you promote because it's our culture, and if you come to work with our people, be sensitive about it. Sabe the Sabe, know who you're working with. And walk with the people. You've got to walk with the people. Moses walked with his people to understand the people. So you can take the people through. You can come and you walk up here and the people down here and wearing those T-shirts with all kinds of design on it.

##### **[00:32:47.930] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Don't wear it if you're not going to come and promote it in our community because it's not working. It's not working for our people. And I'm a strong believer of that. I get upset when I see them wearing those T-shirts. It's like an insult to me. Hey, don't come in and wear them kind T-shirt. You must come in a sub... You know that land, whose land it is. You know the people. You have to learn before you come inside to that community. You can just come in like that. It's a no-no. That's why nothing's work. We haven't got the right people. The job for the people in isolated remote indigenous community, whether it's Torres Street or anywhere else around Australia, they've got to have the people working on the ground. You can't work from Kenes in Brisbane or anywhere else and thinking you can come in and work with the people? No. Back in the community, train the people in the community to work with their people. That's what you have to do. Because the people know best how to work with their people. I'm moved by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. I can go into an organization, I can go into the hospital and I can feel and I can sense.

##### **[00:34:05.570] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

I know this person is good to me. I know this person is not good to me. Before I didn't have that understanding, I look about body language or how they talk. Because people speak, you know them by their speech, the fruit of the spirit. If you don't have the fruit of the spirit, then how can you come in and you think that you can work with the people? No, you don't know how to work with the people. You've got to come through people who knows them, talk to them, sit down with them, eat with them, sit on the ground and talk. Not sit on the chair. Don't sit around the roundtable. Sit on the ground and talk. That's how we used to do business before on country. Aboriginal people, tourist rate people sit on the ground and talk and let's talk properly. Talk proper talk. Not talk here, adaukos. Behind somebody's back. You have to speak and you've got to speak in front of you. Look him in the eye and talk to them. This is how we do business. I don't know, maybe it's just me. Somebody else maybe got another view. I don't know

##### **[00:35:00.950] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

I know.

##### **[00:35:01.350] - Bernard Namok**

Is there a message that you have for families living with disability that may be struggling or going through a hard time?

##### **[00:35:14.050] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Well, I'm aware that a lot of our families are struggling with disability. I know that I did with my grandson. I want to say that I took my grandson away from here, from Tagau College, 2013. He didn't go to school for the whole here. And then I was going to get fined something like three or five thousand for not sending him to school. But because it comes back to the education, the learning in this school, I know from my grandson because he went there from grade two to grade seven, didn't learn anything. And I had to struggle. I had to go against four government department to take him out of tier to go to Cairnes to the nearest school in Cairns, my boy, in Cairns, mind you. The first one is housing. The first one is the school, because from my place to the school, it's only 100 yards, and that's the nearest school. But because he has disability and because of his learning, because I know that when he went to grade eight here at the high school, he was doing work, bringing home books like he was in Grade 1. And I was part of the school and he was part of the school from grade two to grade seven in the main classroom, didn't have a special Ed.

##### **[00:36:51.910] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

I don't know about now whether they do have a special Ed at the school. Not like Cairns, where they got a special unit, especially for children with disability, learning disabilities, not up here. But this is the thing what I'm talking about. So fighting those four departments, up study, one of them, my biggest stumbling block. Living this school here on TI, housing, how I'm going to live in Cairns. I got a home. This is my home. Now I want to take my son with disability, disabled, from here to Cairnes. Who's going to look after him? I can't put him in boarding school. So after writing letters to ministers, to Upstudy, Centralink, praise God, by the grace of God, everything was granted. And I had a dear friend, she was a non-indigenous. This is what I'm talking about, a non-indigenous people that comes and work in here. This non-indigenous lady that works here on TI for. When I spoke to this lady, she helped me. My application was filled, sent it off to Trinity Bay. As soon as that application in Trinity Bay was approved, I was still waiting on housing. Housing said I couldn't go because I had a house here.

##### **[00:38:24.440] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

I said I couldn't go because it was only for children... I was able to body children to travel to boarding school and not children with disability, but I've proven them all wrong. I was able to take him to Cairns. Everything was granted, was approved, granted. We went to Cairnes, but we had to pay two rent, rent for here and rent in Cairnes. So that was a disadvantage too. But then through the leadership at that time of Mayor Gela and Mayor Pedro Stephen and with the minister, I was able to... There was another... See, policies are made. It's to govern, so that nations can be governed. If you don't have a policy in place, people would go chaos and they'd be killing in a country and everybody would be doing things the opposite way. And that's why policy govern things. But you can work around policies. This is what I'm telling everybody up here. Look at the needs basis of that person and work around the needs basis. You can make a considerable consideration. You can make a provision around it based on the policy. Like I said, a yes, yes and a no, no. You can never do it if it's not a yes and a no, because you can't move the policy.

##### **[00:39:54.990] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

But I was able to. And we went to Cairns for the four years, 9, 10, 11, 12. And I tell you what, in year nine, he had a very good Canadian teacher. He learned to read and to write. And today he reads and writes. You can go onto his laptop, he can do anything. Because I took him out of a remote indigenous community. But that was a battle for me to take him out of here. And this boy here, my grandson, Isaiah Solomon David, he sits the presidents for any tourist trip island to children or any children with disability that wants to go and access anything in mainstream Australia. I rest my case. You have to fight. We fight the system. This is what we want. This is for... Because I'm not going to be around for long. Gee, next year I'm going to be 70. I'm with a disability. I've got a grandson with disabilities in the room. I'm, praise God, he's not listening. He doesn't like that word. I had to put something in place for him. This is what we indigenous people, this is what we do. We look after our extended family.

##### **[00:41:10.920] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

We look after children, children and children, children, generation. We're not like non-indigenous people, where once you're old enough, you can go. You go get your own job, you buy your own house, you do this, you do that, not with us. We're still living extended and extended families.

##### **[00:41:26.290] - Bernard Namok**

We have to look after one another, making sure that families and extended families, you're right. That's the nuclear.

##### **[00:41:33.450] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

That's the fabric of our culture. I'm so proud to be an indigenous person, a first nation woman. Even though it's a struggle. Yeah.

##### **[00:41:44.920] - Bernard Namok**

Do you feel comfortable talking about our story or your story? You speak to them, you're not using the word. So you might telling us his story.

##### **[00:42:01.780] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

He, don't like that word because it's just that... I think because that segregation thing, because he's just growing. When he was in primary school, he was with the other class, even though he didn't do the work. He was just sitting with all the kids and he would draw most of the time and then waiting for recess or lunch, then he goes and plays. But when he came to high school and we had built a separate section for the children with disability.

##### **[00:42:31.950] - Bernard Namok**

Instead of including them in one page, they should be- He didn't.

##### **[00:42:34.690] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Include them because it's got high fence. You have to look at it and I don't like to see it. It's like a prison wall. It was then that he realized that he had disability because it couldn't come over. I said, I try to explain it to him because it's different. Because you're in high school now, it's not junior primary anymore, it's secondary, and it's higher education, but it was something that he couldn't understand. But because he couldn't come over to the boys and girls that he went to school with from grade two to grade seven, he doesn't understand that word segregation, how you segregate people. But he knew that he couldn't come from there to play with them or to come to even buy lunch at the tuck shop. That's why he doesn't like that word. But I know that when he went to Trinity Bay, the special Ed, it's so beautiful at the layout of the school. I give them that much and I speak very highly of Trinity Bay and in Cairns. I'm sure the other schools are like that too, but because I'm only dealing with Trinity Bay. The special ed, he was in special ed.

##### **[00:43:49.860] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

But the thing about it is the beauty about it is he was able to come to the tuck shop. He was able to come to play with the kids like rugby, basketball, gym. But in a remote indigenous community, like up here in the Taurus trait here on, they separate them. I don't know why. Don't ask me. Even though I've tried to address this, but how can they do it down mainstream? I even see kids that are Paramatta primary school in Cairnes, where they've got that section with special head where the kids can still come out and play. They have teachers during that morning tea that they're supervising the kids. They have it up here too, but they don't have that inclusion what we're talking about. We're talking about that inclusion to have that inclusiveness, not to leave them out.

##### **[00:44:51.460] - Speaker 2**

Did you go back to the mental state for the pikinini (kids). You have to include.

##### **[00:44:58.930] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Even though he didn't realize that when he was in primary school because he was always... Even though we didn't do the work that they were doing, he just sits and draws while everybody else is doing the work. I don't know, I was a grandmother too, and I always go to the school and try to get them to do something for him. But they're saying that we can't separate him. He has to be part of the school, the curriculum. But he wasn't learning. That's the disadvantage what I'm talking about for children up here. So right through, right up until grade eight, when he came to grade eight, then he realized. He went to school only for one week. After one week, I didn't send him to school. Everybody come and knock on my door. I slam my door on them. He's not going to school. I made the decision. I said, Grandmother, I'm going to take him out of here. I'm going to give him the best school, even though if it's going to make me work hard here and go down to Cairns and work hard and come back to TI, because I have to do that as a grandmother.

##### **[00:46:03.130] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Nobody else is going to do it. This is what we do as indigenous people. We do it for our children, even though we struggle, but we try to make ends meet. Thank God. We have extended families and families around our families in Cains. Especially for our children with disability appear. I think that word too, we've been using for too long, island way. I remember when we first had that first meeting at Malu Oz, and that word we'd be be used in crippled. They didn't like that word, like the word, didn't like it. I'm very sad that I'm hoping that from your visit and the daughter, one from WA, and I like, you know, what you're talking about, about coming back to the people and to the local people and to the community, to the elders to talk to them and find out what they want. How do they want to see. Then it's going to go back to the policy people. It's the people that are writing the policy.

##### **[00:47:38.480] - Bernard Namok**

Coming from community.

##### **[00:47:40.240] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Level voices. Community gives the information. They go with all the information. Now, how they write the policy? I don't know. Because sometimes the policy governs, and when you try to move out of the policy, you can't. So appropriateness, that sound mind, knowledge, wisdom and understanding to write that policy that's going to capture not only indigenous people, but government as well. Our government is going to work with them. Because if you're not going to have that written and tie in properly, it's not going to work. They've been trying to do this for many years. Look, how old I am now? 69 years old. We are still trying to say, Well, it's not the right uniform. Let's change it. We've got to set up something else. We set up something else and something else and something, and we're spending money here and spending money there and spending money there. Spend the money probably go to the people. Let the people do it. Then you come back and write the policy. Don't just go and do a policy and desktop and then the policy is ready and yes, you're ready to roll out and implement it. No.

##### **[00:49:07.000] - Bernard Namok**

You have to go back for the people.

##### **[00:49:08.210] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

To review. You have to go back to the people to view it. You have to view something. If you don't view it, you don't even know what's going on. It's very important. I don't know how, and I'm hoping that with this new indigenous network disability, that the people that... As an advocate for the people in the community, we have to look at getting the people to work with the people in the community, create the job in the community, not a fly in and a fly out. Because a lot of the services up here, they fly in and fly out. They don't even know what they're doing.

##### **[00:50:00.440] - Bernard Namok**

And then new workers, they come, so they have to tell the same message from the last previous workers. Repeat that message for the people, and people are frustrated to hear them. Same issues again.

##### **[00:50:15.420] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Same issues. It's nothing new. It's like I wake up every day. I go out my door and I look to my left and I look to my right and I said, Lord, take this burden away from me. I'm so suppressed and I'm oppressed. Because there's nothing. I mean, I live in the city 40 years. I can go anywhere, jump on the bus and the train and the ferry, and I can fly go here and I can fly go there. I can take a taxi here. I can go to here, do shopping. I can go to there, do shopping. I can go to theater, go and watch movies. You can't go anywhere here. There's nothing. Saturday, Sunday come, there's nothing for the kids, nothing for children with disability, nothing for anybody. We're just going around the circle. We need a new wine skin. We don't need an old wine skin. We need to pour the wine into a new wine skin because it's a new vision. Today, a new people are the new generation, the new vision. Old men dream dreams, young men see vision. This is what I'd like to see. Let's scout the nation in the tourist rate.

##### **[00:51:27.260] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Let's look at our leaders in the Torres Strait. Sending not only look after the greatest, look after the least too. There's people down here that's going to do the ground. We're going to do this apprenticeship to do this, be electrician, be horticulture, be this, be that. This is what we have. But we're not doing it. How long I've been here? Twenty years I've been back. We're not doing it. Is it our fault? Is it leadership fault? It is government or who? I know when I go to meetings, I give them run for their money because nobody pays me, even though I'm a recipient of Centrelink and they give me my money. But, hell, I'm going to talk. Even if I sit in the old people's home, I'll still talk. I'll still have a voice. And we want to groom the generation because God said to Abraham, This land I give it to you is an everlasting. I think I'm going to close off on this. This land I give it to you, it's an everlasting possession. And this is for our first nations people and any other first nations people or wherever people come from, from which country.

##### **[00:52:44.010] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

As long as you have a blood tie to the land and to the sea, God said to Abraham, this land, I'll give it to you. It's an everlasting possession. It's perpetual. It's forever and ever and ever. It's from your descendant, descendant, descendant, from your generation to generation to generation, from your children to children to children and forever. This is not government rights. This is not people's rights. This is a God-given rights to this planet Earth. Because he owns the oven and he owns the Earth. He can shake anything. Because we are praying people, tourist rather on the people, we are praying people. We pray for everything significant. Food, meetings, gatherings. That's why I said to all my brothers, the big guns, I speak to Aboriginal people are the big guns because they speak for both people. But this is coming to this table now with government, where we're going to have voice from two nations, first nations people. The voice is going to be from the leadership to the elders to the youth because they're setting it in three chambers: the local level, the regional level. And that's why I'm asking, who are going to be those people that is going to sit around the table, the advisory executive to the government?

##### **[00:54:25.490] - Aunty Abigail Harry**

Who is going to be those people that are sitting around the table to talk to government? And I mentioned this to Brother Noel with this meeting up here. We must not anymore. That's why we are still lacking. We are still behind. We should be like Aboriginal people. We should be having our people at the table as well. We have to come to the table. We need an equal representation around the table. We need a double portion. You can't have 10 executives to the government, and you have one. Every time there's always been one, Torres Strait Island. Now, Torres Strait needs to wake up. They need to have an equal representation around the table. Let's say there's 20 in the executive to government. Well, 10 of each. If it's 40, let's make 40, Aboriginal 20, Torres Strait Island people. If they've got so many people sitting in state parliament and Commonwealth Parliament, this is the type of negotiation and dialog that we're going to go in as indigenous people. Esso. Thank you. We say, we say welcome. We say.

##### **[00:55:44.880] - Speaker 2**

And that was Aunty Abigail Harry, a Iama woman living on Thursday Island, but she yarned about the lack of resources, funding, and a greater need for people living with disability across the Torres Strait.

##### **[00:55:58.000] - Uncle Seaman Dan Song**

We say welcome to the Torres Strait

##### **[00:56:00.510] - 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-Jun (as the co-founder of the company). 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. Fpdn. Org. Au.