##### **[00:00:00.720] - 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 Snr, and an advocate for the first People's Disability Network. Join me now on Yarning Disability as we're here to showcase First Nations people living with a disability, as well as their families and carers and other industry professionals.

##### **[00:00:43.980] - Bernard Namok**

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 Aunty Gail Rankin, and acknowledge all first peoples living with a disability.

##### **[00:01:28.100] - Bernard Namok**

Stunning landscapes, remote communities, and a strong and rich culture. Alice Springs, a locally known as Mparntwe, is a remote town in the Northern Territory, halfway between Darwin in Adelaide, both is 1500 kilometers away. On today's episode of Yarning Disability, FPDN and advocate Jordan Wishart, had a yarn with Joel Walker, who is paraplegic, about his disability and the long journey of emotions and healing to get to where he is today.

##### **[00:02:09.160] - Joel Walker**

My name is Joel Walker. I'm from Alice Springs. I'm 35 years old. My disability is the fourth vertebrae from my spine is shattered completely. And my disability is C4, level down. And from my shoulders down, I've got a lack of movement. I've got a lack of use of anything from my shoulders down. I can move my arms, but I can't move my fingers. Well, that's a big difficulty, but yeah, I make it work.

##### **[00:02:43.960] - Jordan Wishart**

I guess with your disability, I guess what are your barriers and what's your disability caused, I guess?

##### **[00:02:53.360] - Joel Walker**

Okay. With my condition, well, my barriers are obviously physical, not mental, but I'm confined to a wheelchair. That makes a lot of barriers on its own. It's inconvenient for shops or certain places, or even footpath itself makes it really quite difficult.

##### **[00:03:16.520] - Jordan Wishart**

I guess being in a wheelchair and having a lot of accessibility issues around town and transport and stuff, what is that? I guess the barriers are there and what's that causing?

##### **[00:03:29.660] - Joel Walker**

Well, my limitations are quite high because I've got four children. Growing up, my son, he's been with me since he's been 10 years old. Sport-wise, activity-wise, I can't go on bush hikes with him. I can't jump on a motorbike and go things like this. The limitations of this has caused quite a lot. I'm really limited to the resources in town. Alice Springs is quite a small town. So when it comes to that, there's not a lot... There's not a lot of accessibility for disability clients, full stop, really.

##### **[00:04:06.310] - Jordan Wishart**

Can you tell me a bit about how your disability was caused?

##### **[00:04:10.160] - Joel Walker**

I got assaulted with a shovel after an argument that was a dispute. I wasn't the one being rowdy, but we were both being argumentative. My cousin turned around and picked up a shovel and smashed it around my neck, and that's what shattered my full vertebrae. When I got hit, I got hit with the shovel and it shattered. It didn't do anything to my spine. It just shattered. I didn't do anything to my… What's that?

##### **[00:04:38.710] - Jordan Wishart**

Cord, cor d?

##### **[00:04:39.270] - Joel Walker**

Your spinal cord? Yeah, my spinal cord. It just completely shattered the full vertebrae. I fell straight to the ground because I jumped straight up after I got hit. That's when my head went like that. When I hit the ground, you couldn't actually see that I was quite badly injured. Then while I was laying there, I was begging my brothers to pick me up and take me inside because the concrete was freezing cold. I ended up getting one of them to chuck me over the shoulder because they rocked up after this dispute happened. There was only me, my little sister, and that young fellow that did it to me. They didn't witness anything. They just turned around and they knew that I was hurt, but they didn't know the severity of it. So when they chucked me over their shoulders and they took me inside and they chucked me on a mattress in the lounge room, they continued to party while laying there, practically dying, but not knowing the-.

##### **[00:05:38.330] - Jordan Wishart**

Seriousness, I guess.

##### **[00:05:39.350] - Joel Walker**

Yeah, the seriousness of the situation. So I was laying there and then just out of luck, my mom felt sick at work. She had butterflies in the stomach, knew something was wrong. She come back home. When she come back home, I passed away. Ambulance got there, got to the hospital, passed away. Then got on a row of flying doctors, finally got to Adelaide, probably about seven or took about seven to nine hours before the actual operation. That's what caused the severity of because at the end of the day, if the operation didn't take that long, the severity of this injury wouldn't have been as bad.

##### **[00:06:22.310] - Jordan Wishart**

With the whole situation, I bet you're very lucky with the... As you said, you passed away for like what? About twice within it? Three times. Three times.

##### **[00:06:34.450] - Joel Walker**

That's- I do remember one of them when I was in hospital. I know that for facts. I went back to the doctor after I come back and it spun him right out that I remembered all of it. It was completely like my... I remember beep, beep, beep, beep. Then after that, I recall everything. Then I woke up in Adelaide and I was like, Hey, what's going on here?

##### **[00:06:59.300] - Jordan Wishart**

So you're saying, I guess after the fact that you did the surgery and everything, I guess you survived and come in too. How hard was it for you after the fact and realizing, I guess, what your life will be like after that, after the incident?

##### **[00:07:14.730] - Joel Walker**

Well, at the time, I was actually taking care of my oldest son. And once the realization sunk in probably about an hour or two after I woke up, I was distraught because there was a lot of in my head about how I was going to be a father, how they were going to look up to me, how I could still be a man in their eyes while being in a wheelchair. There was a lot of mental battle. Especially at that stage, I couldn't even move, and there was a lot of rehab in between that. But through depression, I got a lot more usage back. But fighting depression at the same time as I'm doing rehab, it's not a real easy mix. And all I wanted to do was come home to my kids. Couldn't see my kids because they wouldn't understand. Brought my son down. He had no understanding of what was going on. That hurt me, but I was more happy to see him.

##### **[00:08:22.370] - Jordan Wishart**

Through that experience of being in hospital and then after the fact, I guess the treatment and or if there was anything that would help you through that process back then, maybe looking back at that situation. Is there anything there? Maybe the health clinic could do or family could do to help you through that process.

##### **[00:08:44.820] - Joel Walker**

Or-to be honest, the best way I can put it would have been there. There should have been. I wish there was more emotional support. Being a man, obviously, we don't want to be degrading ourselves and crying in front of anyone. I held a lot away from a lot of people, and I barely cried. That's what caused the depression even harder. I was holding a lot of it in. Family support would have been would have been the biggest one, really. But with a lack of support from my mother, she was still growing up my younger siblings at the time. Financially, it wasn't stable for her to stick around. But emotionally, it would have meant a world to me.

##### **[00:09:34.000] - Jordan Wishart**

When you say that would Aboriginal councilors or Aboriginal therapy workers around that, would that would have been beneficial in that situation, do you think?

##### **[00:09:46.030] - Joel Walker**

Well, in the rehab, there was no Aboriginal support workers at all, especially because I was the only indigenous person there. There wasn't even an Aboriginal liaison officer. So being down there, it's hard to talk to white people and they don't understand our situation. The first thing is like, You don't know me and you don't understand us. Well, how are you going to help? That's always been my three struggles, like trying to open up to white people in general. I'm not a racist person. I don't care who you are. I'll have a conversation with you. But when it comes to emotional support, there was no support. It's not even about emotional support, it's about mental support. There was no Aboriginal liaison officers there at all.

##### **[00:10:37.150] - Jordan Wishart**

Yeah. So it's that lack of understanding with non-indigenous carers and stuff that didn't know your background or where it come from.

##### **[00:10:44.790] - Joel Walker**

They knew that I was like, when my family… They seen my color, but because I'm a well-spoken English and I'm well-educated, they didn't understand where all my family come from Bush, like my family from Bush. So when my family walked through the door, everyone understood them, and they freaked right out. They're like, Oh, is that all your family? I was like, Yeah. They should have supported me from the start. They should have been out there. There was a liaison officer there, and there was... What are they called? Not a psychiatrist.

##### **[00:11:25.790] - Jordan Wishart**

Psychologist.

##### **[00:11:27.050] - Joel Walker**

There was a psychologist there, but they should have been the ones that, Okay, no worries. I can't help him. I'm going to reach out to organizations to see who I can get involved to support him better, knowing that she couldn't support me. I wasn't being rude about it. I was just given a cold shoulder because I didn't know how to open.

##### **[00:11:52.590] - Jordan Wishart**

Up to her. I guess, is that lack of understanding on their side of what their abilities are, or where their service stops, so they need to be able to get someone else in.

##### **[00:12:02.280] - Joel Walker**

It's a lack of education. It's a lack of knowing where the right resources are is the better way of putting it. Because I'm sure if they knew of an Aboriginal, like liaison officer or practitioner or something that was in the rehab at the time, I'm sure they would have approached them. But it's just a lack of knowledge. I'm not saying there was a... Because in Adelaide, it's quite open compared to a small town that we're from, where I'm from. But there would have been someone available. But because the rehab was more worried about the physical instead of the mental, that's where they lacked.

##### **[00:12:48.060] - Jordan Wishart**

Do you think if there were more support for your family around the travel and accommodation being there for you, that would have helped a lot more?

##### **[00:12:58.110] - Joel Walker**

That would have took a lot of strain off my mother. Because at the end of the day, her and her partner was going through a difficult situation. They sold the house, I would have had more support emotionally and mentally. But because there was a lack of support or organizations involved, there was no help whatsoever for my mother. And she spent a lot of the money in a short amount of time because she didn't have a job. It was the driving back and forth from where she was to the rehab center. There was the rental situation.

##### **[00:13:40.340] - Jordan Wishart**

Yes. Let's just talk about maybe your experience coming back, being here here in Alice after your accident, and maybe the support or lack of support you got, seeking getting accommodation or any areas like that.

##### **[00:13:56.000] - Joel Walker**

Coming back to Alice Springs, everything I did, I was done on my own. I approached the advocacy, same thing. Same problem I had with there was no indigenous support where the people down there were lovely people. I won't say they're a bad thing about them, but it was just a lack of knowledge of where I come from, how we can go about it. It's more on a conversation stake as well, because nothing related with... But nothing relatable to talk about other than the issue that they're going to help me about. When I got back, I'd completely done everything on my own. I lived in the hospital for three years. I approached housing when I first got back here. I was on the list for four years. In between that time, every time I had a meeting with them, I had the advocacy team there two times, or maybe three, over several meetings I had with them. But there was no indigenous support, no cultural awareness, no help in the push towards housing. And then when it comes to crunch with territory housing, when it comes down to four years, it was like a spit in the face when they turned around and said that didn't have any houses to support, any accommodations to support my living circumstance.

##### **[00:15:34.570] - Jordan Wishart**

So where were you for four years?

##### **[00:15:37.190] - Joel Walker**

I was in the hospital for three of them, three and a half, and then I went to supported accommodation. And the reason I fought so much not to go there is because my disability is physical. It's not mental. And when I got there, it's really an uncomfortable zone because these guys are playing loud music, the other one is blasting TV, and then a lot of behavioral issues that weren't getting addressed properly. I advocated for them quite a few times to the point where life and barriers were stick with me because I was keeping them to their standards of their roles and what they were meant to be doing. There was a lot of... How can I put it? There was a lot of the restrictions in place that were illegal that they shouldn't have been doing full stop to any clients. There was physical interactions with one of the clients. The other client, which they stated was his house. So when we both got there, we got there within a week of each other. And the staff that was there was still under the impression that it was another client's house, that it wasn't our house.

##### **[00:16:58.470] - Joel Walker**

We were limited. We weren't even allowed to sit in. We had the impression that the lounge room was the other clients. So we just sat outside the whole time. The restrictions they put on the other client was disgusting. That was unhuman. They were told from the management of a certain company in town that they had to physically restrain him. So they used to grab him, drag him back into the house. And then there was fights. And a lot of times the staff got injured because they were doing what they were told to do. But what they were doing was inhumane.

##### **[00:17:40.560] - Jordan Wishart**

At any point that then the housing, so the shared accommodation, did it feel like a home?

##### **[00:17:46.020] - Joel Walker**

No, it never did. It didn't feel like a home for any of us. It felt more like a prison. It was like an institution, more like it. Where we were told, clients were told what to do. They'd push a client in front of a TV, walk away, leave him for the rest of their shift.

##### **[00:18:04.690] - Jordan Wishart**

Yeah, maybe just talk a little, just tell you more about the conditions of that, the shared accommodation.

##### **[00:18:10.460] - Joel Walker**

I was just getting on to... Yeah. Okay. Our living standards weren't to them. Emotionally weren't supported. No, physically weren't supported. Where the other client was nonverbal. He didn't have a physical condition, but he couldn't speak to what he wanted. There was no interaction with both the clients nor me. I only interacted with the clients with the staff need be. But other than that, the other works that were just sitting in the other lounge room, and they just lounge around. There was quite a few wicked workers, I must admit. But the majority of the ones that were there from the main organization, there was a lack of support, lack of physical, mental support.

##### **[00:19:02.170] - Jordan Wishart**

Why do you think that was? Do you reckon it was there just there wasn't the appropriate staffing or the job that people there weren't there for the right reasons? Or why do you think that was?

##### **[00:19:11.940] - Joel Walker**

Most of the workers that were... In the living conditions, most of the workers that were the carers there from the organization, it was good money. They'd have three or four jobs. And when they got to our house, once the shower was done, if the food was done and the medication was handed out, they just more lounge. There was no activities for both the clients. For me, I'm okay. I can cruise around myself. I'm quite independent in this wheelchair, and I live my life to the highest standards I physically can. But for the other clients, there was no stimulation for them. They were just pushed in corners. One was just left all day and night. And that's where a lot of the... How would you word it? A lot of the negative behavior stemmed from was just showing no care. Yeah.

##### **[00:20:16.620] - Jordan Wishart**

The lack of stimulus, I guess, that they got from their workers. I guess, how was your experience with services like housing, NT, and I guess, other service providers?

##### **[00:20:34.150] - Joel Walker**

Approaching them was quite easy, but the support, not talking about... Oh, yeah, talking about all of them. Approaching them was quite easy. But when it comes to actual support, let's go with meeting support. When you have to go in and have a meeting, they're happy to sit there and write down the notes, but there was no actual- -connection? -drive for them to be there. Drive for them to actually help out. That happened with a lot of organizations. Or there'd be other organizations that'd be saying, Oh, yeah. No, a person's coming. Two weeks later, Oh, no, that person's out on this. Oh, that person's out on that. And there's a lot of just push, push, push, push. And then when it comes down to it, you push a person away a few times. They're not going to want the interaction. They're not going to want to interact back with you because it was a negative experience.

##### **[00:21:37.320] - Jordan Wishart**

And you feel like there was no accountability there?

##### **[00:21:40.320] - Joel Walker**

Especially there was no accountability. Everyone was there to get paid, and that was it. The lack of management was a big one because managers were main... For a lot of organizations, the managers weren't even there for the right reasons. And for about three organizations that I can know of personally, and I do know the managers quite well, every time the management got there, because everything was piled up, all the bad things was piled up beforehand, they get them. They don't even know what they're doing because there was no criteria put down for them. So when they got there… How can I word that better?

##### **[00:22:26.860] - Jordan Wishart**

What are you trying to say? Like the….

##### **[00:22:29.240] - Joel Walker**

When the old boss would leave, he'd leave because he's stuck plainly, he fucked up really bad at quite a few times. And then the big boss is like, You're sad. Then the next person that come on had to try and fix everything that was going on. Then on top of that support, the staff and the clients.

##### **[00:22:54.550] - Jordan Wishart**

Did you feel maybe they weren't qualified.

##### **[00:22:57.050] - Bernard Namok**

Or-it's not about the qualification. It was about the mess that was left behind before them. Yeah.

##### **[00:23:02.490] - Jordan Wishart**

I guess always trying to fix stuff or-They.

##### **[00:23:07.560] - Joel Walker**

Were really beautiful people and they were there for the right reasons. Then you get someone that's not there for the right reasons, fixes everything up. Then there's no support for the staff or for the client. There was always support for the staff, always, because they needed staff members to do the job to bring the money in, might as well say. But when it comes to issues, well, personally, my issue is quite a few times. I had a few problems with a few staff members, and we'd have meetings. I'd raise all my issues to the manager because the manager is in our meeting because I've requested that. They're like, Oh, my God. I can't believe this has happened to you. Okay, Norris. As soon as the other staff member speaks, the team leader of the other staff member, and they bring up all their concerns, my concerns just get pushed under the rug. They're more worried about keeping their staff happy instead of supporting me or making sure that whatever happened doesn't happen again.

##### **[00:24:10.270] - Jordan Wishart**

Talk about, I guess your experience with, I guess, how your disability has, I guess, affected your ability to care for your kids?

##### **[00:24:22.650] - Joel Walker**

Or something like that. As I'm affected, it's just my boundaries that I've had to go around to be able to look after my children.

##### **[00:24:31.400] - Jordan Wishart**

Do you want to talk about your experience of having disability while also caring for your kids?

##### **[00:24:38.290] - Joel Walker**

That's actually a good one. That's a really good one. Go with that.

##### **[00:24:43.800] - Jordan Wishart**

Go with that.

##### **[00:24:44.700] - Joel Walker**

Okay.

##### **[00:24:46.010] - Jordan Wishart**

So tell us your experience, I guess, having a disability and caring for your child.

##### **[00:24:54.010] - Joel Walker**

Well, that's the ultimate sacrifice right there for any parent on my side, as you're looking after your child and being disabled, having a disability is a better way to word it.

##### **[00:25:12.610] - Jordan Wishart**

Tell us what it's like to be a parent with a disability.

##### **[00:25:16.200] - Joel Walker**

Yeah, being a parent with a disability, it's quite a struggle mentally and physically, and there's a lot of hurdles that we got to jump to. But there's no support when it comes to being a parent and being disabled as well. That's one thing that I can see that's a major issue. There's support for mental. There's support for a lot of different things, which they're lacking everywhere. But when it comes to being a full-blown parent and having kids under your care, there's no support whatsoever. There's a lot of boundaries when it comes to kids because everyone's there to care for you. They're not there to support you as being a parent. There's a lot of boundaries when it comes up to kids and care and carers. That's a really big one because I've struggled with a lot of organizations, like my first organization that I was with when I got my son, the only two things that they would do for my son was washing, and they wouldn't do it for him. They just chucked all these clothes in with my washing and dinners. They wouldn't do dinner for him. I was vegan at the time, but I had to change my whole lifestyle and bowlcook a dinner just so I could support my son because they were told not to do anything for my son.

##### **[00:26:46.410] - Joel Walker**

My son was 10 years old when I got him. That's caused a lot of mental scarring for him as well. Because at 10 years old, he's doing his own washing. He's cleaning his own room. There was a lot of pressure put on him that shouldn't have been at his tender age. And as being a parent, too, there was a lot of... That's an emotional thing, too, because you're sitting there watching your son. Obviously, physically, I can't help them. But I try like... It's like being mentally strong enough for myself and to watch my son struggle through that as well.

##### **[00:27:25.300] - Jordan Wishart**

Yeah, just tell us a little bit your experience with housing.

##### **[00:27:28.610] - Joel Walker**

Well, my experience with housing has been quite terrible the whole time I've dealt with them. Now being in the house, they leave me alone with the understanding that they will get burnt. But it took me four years because when we're on priority housing in the NT, it's four years. I waited four years with the struggles of being in hospital, being in shared accommodation. They were all well aware of this. Then right at the end of the fourth year, on the date, I went in there and I approached housing about getting a house. They turned around and spat my face and said that they got their houses to facilitate my needs. I'm telling you now, I wouldn't be the only person that's come across this. With that information, I went to legal aid, went back. The lawyer wanted to stew. I just wanted a house after four years of having nowhere to go, me and my kids to interact with. But it was really disgusting the way Northern Territory, the housing department treated me knowing that I was a parent and physically disabled.

##### **[00:28:44.850] - Jordan Wishart**

So your experience with, I guess, seeing it from being trying to seek help and, I guess you've gone into shared care. I guess what was your experience in seeing mob with mental health or psychosocial disabilities and their experiences in seeking help?

##### **[00:29:01.500] - Joel Walker**

I really feel bad for them because they don't get a choice where they get to go. When it comes to housing as well, I feel sorry for them. People with a mental… They're mentally unstable, whether it be an aggression or whether it would just be just in general, someone with cerebral palsy, they can't actually advocate for themselves. For me, I've finally got my own house. It's taking me ages. It's taking me years just to get comfortable. I've now got my son. I'm content in my own house. But someone with a mental disability, there's someone that snatches them up and takes them into a house and chucks another three people. There's four clients with a mental disability just chucked into a house. Where's the support for them? When I was in the shared accommodation, I only seen a lawyer once every six months for this young fellow, asking two or three questions. He was too scared to answer them because the carers are right there. I advocated for him, and a little couple of things changed for him after that. But it makes me feel bad because what if I wasn't there? A lot of them are on their own.

##### **[00:30:09.550] - Joel Walker**

They don't have family support. There's no one there that wants to be a part of their life.

##### **[00:30:21.320] - Bernard Namok**

That was Joel Walker, sharing his story on yarning disability. If there's anything you heard in today's episode that raises concerns for you, there is help available. You can contact 1-3 Yarn on 1392-76 or BeyondBlue on 1-300-224636 or Lifeline on 1311-14. Thanks for listening to Yarning Disability. 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.fpdn. Org. Au.