

00:00:06:24 - 00:00:38:09

Bernard Namok

Hi and welcome to The Yarning Disability podcast, I'm your host Bernard Namok Junior . I'm a proud Saint Paul, Badu and Erubian man from the Torres Straits. And I'm also the son of the designer of the Torres Strait Islander Flag, Bernard Namok senior and advocate for the First Peoples 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.

00:00:44:19 - 00:01:13:03

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.

00:01:13:21 - 00:01:26:21

Carly Wallace

FPDN would like to acknowledge our founding elders and their lasting legacy, Uncle Lester Bostock and Aunty Gayle Rankin, and acknowledge all First Peoples living with a disability.

00:01:27:18 - 00:01:52:20

Bernard Namok

Rene Barker Mulholland is a First Nations woman living in Narm. She has an autoimmune disease called enclosing spondylitis. Over time, it can cause some of the bones in the spine to Fuze. She's also a mother of children with disabilities, autism and ADHD. She yarned to me what it's like to navigate through life in the big cities as a First Nations person with a disability.

00:01:53:08 - 00:02:14:21

Bernard Namok

But this hasn't stopped her from being there for her family and mob that she crossed path with a First Nation woman and advocate for human and disability justice and just a heads up. The following conversation may contain some coarse language.

00:02:15:03 - 00:02:44:22

Renay Barker-Moulholland

My name is Rene Barker- Mouholland. I'm a Biripi, Dunghutti woman from Mid North Coast. I live on Wadawurrung country. Now we move to about I got about 15 years ago now. I'd never been here before and we moved here and me and my partner and have lived and loved here ever since. But yeah, it sounds a bit like it.

00:02:44:22 - 00:03:10:09

Renay Barker-Moulholland

I'm a bit big noting myself, but I call myself the black of all trades because of eye contact. I do a lot of different things and I think that reflects in my home life as well. Like, I grew up with a parent, with the

disability I grew up with a single parent as well. I lost my parents at an early age.

00:03:10:09 - 00:03:45:01

Renay Barker-Moulholland

I had a kid with a disability. Now my entire family is disabled in different ways. So I've got an autoimmune disease called ankylosing spondylitis. Mouthful. Don't bother with it. But basically it's just, yeah, my body attacks itself and causes a lot of pain and fatigue and lack of movement and stuff like that. So that's about me. My kids, I'm neurodivergent are they autistic and have ADHD

00:03:45:01 - 00:04:16:20

Renay Barker-Moulholland

So has my husband and yeah, we sort of navigate life as we're homeschoolers as well. So we don't send our kids to a mainstream school. So we navigate sort of everything to do with life, with homeschool, navigating disability, navigating our blackness, navigating, you know, like I was talking as my dad's birthday recently and he died about 15 years ago now almost.

00:04:18:14 - 00:04:36:09

Renay Barker-Moulholland

And I said, you know, I said to my son, you know, my my dad would be so proud of you. How cheeky you are, because you'll be just like him. And but, you know, I'm so proud of you. And he had a little tear well up because, you know, he hasn't got that connection. And he hasn't missed out on that.

00:04:36:09 - 00:04:44:14

Renay Barker-Moulholland

And I think that's really what I try and give our families that connection. And that's our main focus point.

00:04:44:23 - 00:05:19:20

Bernard Namok

I think you saying that's my youngest brother. He was when he was six months when my dad passed away back in 93. And the only memory that he have has of my dad is a photo of him. Yeah. And for him, like, he didn't have the connection with my dad or him. It was hard growing up remembering like he carries a picture when he used to be literally used to carry a picture of my dad around.

00:05:19:20 - 00:05:55:21

Bernard Namok

And when my mom ask a couple of teachers at school asks him like, what do you remember of that of your dad? And you kind of paused that long pause and he said, I don't have any memory. The only memory I have is this picture, the last picture of him. And like growing up with my mom, being single parent, it was pretty, pretty hard, you know, like he had to move away from the islands culture, connection and family exactly.

00:05:56:02 - 00:05:56:12

Renay Barker-Moulholland

On that.

00:05:57:03 - 00:06:05:01

Bernard Namok

And live away. Yeah. Just to make that money, you know, to for us to survive. Otherwise.

00:06:05:10 - 00:06:07:14

Renay Barker-Moulholland

Yes. You wouldn't survive. Yeah.

00:06:07:14 - 00:06:28:10

Bernard Namok

Yeah. But you know, like you mentioned that you didn't have a car public, public transport. And, you know, when, when whenever there's, you know, whenever there's a car, I think it's always something wrong. Would you know, there was something wrong.

00:06:28:18 - 00:07:11:16

Renay Barker-Moulholland

Yes. Whenever a car pulled up at school, there was something wrong. We didn't we didn't ever own a car. So that was a signal that, you know, something different was happening or or some kind of trauma had happened. And, you know, that happened a lot in my life as a child of a single parent. You know, both my parents had issues with addiction and mental illness and disability, but were you know, I don't hold any grudges towards them, but I understand why they couldn't be what I needed them to be.

00:07:12:00 - 00:07:42:03

Renay Barker-Moulholland

And that it's a hard thing to learn early. It's a very hard thing to learn early. And then then you start to see the bigger picture of what that disconnection does to everybody and what it does to your being and your, you know, your existence and your whole family. Just you know, and it comes from necessity. Know if i donâ€™t move, I'm not going to be able to support myself.

00:07:42:09 - 00:08:12:20

Bernard Namok

Is like when my grandma used to pull up in a taxi and at the school, me and my sister would wait at the front. She would always bring, you know, like fish and chips or that that meal that we couldn't afford. But she would always, you know, like sacrifice her pension money. So me and my sister would have like a normal lunch to other kids in school.

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Bernard Namok

And I remember I used to be in year six. My mom used to live like back then it was bank books and he used to have the permission slips to take out money from the bank. So my mom used to write permission slips like a lot of permission slips and I would send my mom her pension too. And I was like any of six.

00:08:37:11 - 00:09:01:19

Bernard Namok

And I would walk around, you know, with \$300 in my backpack so I could send money in. We put there was no National Australia Bank. Yeah, it was only Commonwealth. So I had to send the money like during my lunch breaks in my lunch break I would take, you know, my bicycle and and go to the local supermarket and send money to my mum.

00:09:01:21 - 00:09:19:12

Bernard Namok

And I would open up my knapsack and there would be like \$50 note and they were like, How come you carrying all that money? But, you know, it was it was like I had to learn to be independent to at a young age. And I think that kind of it shaped me who I am today.

00:09:19:19 - 00:09:45:07

Renay Barker-Moulholland

It's another thing we have in common. I used to run on my bike with my backpack down to do it. You know, I'd do the groceries, I'd do the pay, the bills and stuff like that. But I was lucky that I had brothers older than me also. So they kind of even I you mentioned your younger brother didn't really have that relationship, but I, I did, but I had a really great relationship with my older brothers as well.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

But, you know, they had to step in in of the place of a paternal figure for me and kind of while they were children themselves and try and, you know, protect me from things that were happening, you know, and people and bad stuff that happened and, you know, that's something a child doesn't have to learn either, that, you know, that it's only I mean, if I'm honest, it's only been the last couple of years that I've stopped sleeping with the metal all behind the front door, because I'm just that I'm just that damaged from the things that have happened in my life.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Like, I still worry about that shit every day. I'll still worry about like my youngest child is blue head. Blue head, you know, has never has blond hair, blue eyes and walking down the street, you know, i say to him are telling the truth. And so they would have taken you from me because your skin looked so different, to mine like they would have taken you from me.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

And it's it's it's almost like I feel a sense of duty to tell them and to educate them about these things that happened. Because I think everybody should know. But also, you know, I shouldn't have to think about that. They shouldn't have to think about, you know, what? What did I do to have to deserve a father that was so broken from what happened to him?

00:11:12:16 - 00:11:16:11

Renay Barker-Moulholland

It probably killed me for saying that. if like.

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Bernard Namok

I.

00:11:18:20 - 00:11:43:00

Renay Barker-Moulholland

I'm fine. But see, that's the other thing to the bravado and the constant aversion that people that mob have to talking about shit, that's hard because it's so, you know, for so long I felt judged about my parenting, about everything. If I was because I know I can pass for not black like I know I have the privilege of being light skinned.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

I'm aware of that. But I still have that fear all the time of judgment and of my children being on their best behavior or the that fear of of being I don't know. It's just an omen. It's sort of like an ever present sort of feeling that every time you go out and if you're publicly black, then, you know, be careful because you'll be judged.

00:12:13:14 - 00:12:22:22

Bernard Namok

It's Damien Griffiths, the CEO of the First People's Disability Network, and you're listening to Yarning Disability.

00:12:22:22 - 00:12:51:01

Renay Barker-Moulholland

So I was born in Sydney and we spent a little bit of time in the inner west around Redfern in the eighties and stuff, and then went out to a little town called Armidale. I don't know if you know where Armidale is, Yes, a lot of my mob still live around there and it's very, it's very telling when you go to a big city and you walk down the street I thought, you know, like I've mentioned, I had a really close relationship with my brothers, you know, tall, dark and handsome.

00:12:51:01 - 00:13:30:19

Renay Barker-Moulholland

And you walk down the street with people with them and people will shy away from them or, you know, try and avoid them. And I'm like, it's it's become more obvious as I use my wheelchair more often. The more I use my wheelchair, the more people look at me, the more people have that same kind of response that they have to ask of any person of color, that kind of fear, and that, you know, and like I know it's one thing I'm very grateful for all that I learned from my father, a joy of of black men, not the joy of black men.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

And seeing that and seeing black men express themselves and be open and, you know, do all those things. And having brothers that weren't afraid to be, you know, telling me that they loved me and that they would do anything for me, and that I think that's a really important thing that

helped ground my family as well as that conversation about connection and continuing that on as well.

00:13:52:24 - 00:13:57:06

Bernard Namok

In that yarn there you mentioned your mum was also an advocate.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Like I mentioned, both my parents had issues with drugs and mental health issues. Um, and so my mum came to advocacy as a recipient of the care. She, you know, my, my aunty called her up and said, come on, I'll take you and I will look after you and whatever. But hooked up with the local, the local neighborhood center and that's where she looks like well, I can see I could make a difference here and she so she started just at the local neighbourhood centre she would help other people that she knew from around town advocate that way and then after a few years they gave her a job and so she became part

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

of the Department of Housing. And so she'd liaise in between tenants and them or because they knew that she had Aboriginal children mob felt comfortable talking to her and sort of using that platform of hers to try and redress the balance of things that have been happening. You know, like she was there on the bridge and idea she marched and I yeah, I don't want to paint like this amazing savior, but that's where it started from this.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

understanding of some what had been happening and what needs to be fixed.

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Bernard Namok

Yeah. And I think modern realized like especially for myself, like with my personal experience, like I've seen how, you know, the system here in Cairns, kind of my big words you know, and without having an interpreter there because the English for most especially up here in far north Queensland, second or third, and especially in my brother's case, you know, like he didn't, they didn't even know for, you know, like the Aboriginal liaison officer to break the big words down for my mom and luckily I stepped in at the right time because you know, like growing up to like I didn't realize that advocating for my dad and the flag happened at a young age of

00:16:08:22 - 00:16:38:01

Bernard Namok

I've always grown up, you know, like if things were to be out in the papers, negative story around the Torres Strait flag, I would kind of jump in and, you know, like say this and that but defend it. But then I put it in a different perspective, you know, like I educate people at the same time, whereas my mom, you know, like I kind of stepped in and I said

to the social worker, like my mom, she had the confusion look on her face.

00:16:38:01 - 00:17:03:04

Bernard Namok

And from that experience, you know, and kind of opened my eyes to accessibility up on the islands. If you're not comfortable signing that form, you don't have to, you know, because you're signing or you don't know what you're signing over to them you might be signing away your rights for them to do and and act upon my brother without your permission.

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Bernard Namok

Because. Yeah, yeah, it's consulting the family so. Yeah. And then that kind of the you know the advocating kinda stepped in.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Gets my gets me angry because you shouldn't have to be dealing with that. You're dealing with something emotional and hard and triggering it yourself and then, you know, I know culturally for us, it's kind of expected that we step in and support. And I would love to and I'm happy to. But in a in a situation like that, where the dominant culture and the dominant the person in control is going to be someone who's not within your culture.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

I yeah, I really think people need to do a better job in general terms that it's it's really, it's really lacking in terms of culture, but also disability and culture together. It's like I sometimes I feel like I have to choose, like be black or be disabled person. Like it's not I can't have a culturally appropriate wheelchair or, you know, you know what I mean?

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Like, yeah, I feel like I have to choose between one or the other. And I think I was lucky in that not only I learned to advocate for my mom, but so I have my dad has like eight siblings, so and a couple of them have worked within the health system, there's a couple of doctors, and there's a couple of solicitors in there.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

And so, you know, at the age of 16, I got the phone call that my dad had fallen into a coma and then they weren't sure that he was going to leave. And, you know, I was little 16 year old me turned up and I hadn't seen him for a couple of years and he was lying in bed in front of me.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

And I had another exposure to that kind of that that cultural advocacy from my aunties, from them saying, you know, this is what's going to happen if he's not going to survive, that this is what and this is what's going to happen. And, you know, I've never been afraid of asking. I always got told, you know, the worst I can say is no

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

So, you know, and, you know, worse off than where you were. So that kind of push towards a natural, um I'm trying to politely least say my mom and my dad would both really hotheaded and wouldn't give up and I think I just inherited that. And and you know, it just is something that I feel really passionate about.

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Bernard Namok

And also, like it takes one person like to tell that story. And then, well, from my experience, you know, once I told that story, you know, and social media and then all the mob up on the island, you sort of coming up with this story. And I think they kind of waited for that one person and then they would continue or then they would feel comfortable without having to be that troublemaker, you know?

00:20:21:24 - 00:20:22:07

Bernard Namok

Yeah.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Yeah. I don't mind being the trouble maker hey

00:20:25:02 - 00:20:31:03

Bernard Namok

I was told, you know, not to sit back and wait, you got to chase if you want to answer. You just got to chase.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

hey, don't wait for someone to give it to you because it probably won't happen.

00:20:36:21 - 00:20:40:24

Bernard Namok

So what's life like for you now with your kids and.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

I really enjoy doing things like this and I, I really enjoy talking because I think our stories, our histories in our stories and you know, if I don't tell the story, there's a wonderful story of my father who was used to we use a wheelchair for the last ten years of his life, a wonderful story about him driving down in a wheelchair.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

He was buck naked, like he had no clothes on at all in his wheelchair, driving down the street. And the topic was, you know, well aware of who he was and said, David, what are you doing? You know, why haven't you got any clothes on? And he goes, Oh, it's from a cultural practice. I'm not wearing. And like, the cop knew he was taking the piss on.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

It's just those little stories about people that keep them alive. And I think stories of people with disability being openly like I'm giving it. I don't care who sees me in a wheelchair, I don't see I don't care who sees me being openly disabled or stumbling on my words or forgetting things or whatever. Like I've got I've got a reason for that and I'm not ashamed of that and there should be no shame about it.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Fuck it, Yeah, and ties in to this whole idea that we should be an ideal and there, you know, there is no idea where all individuals even even twins are not I mean, they might be exactly the same, but they have different experiences and stuff and they're all they're all very valuable and all very worthy of being shared. But I think particularly mob with disability have so much to teach people.

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Bernard Namok

And I think like telling stories too with that, you know, some, some somewhat still have that same fact, you know. And yeah, but you know, if you don't share your story, then how would people know?

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Well, I, I mean, I don't know about you, but telling a story can be a really powerful thing for me. Just telling it, just having someone listen to my story, and say that is crap, that is awesome, or that's whatever it is. But just having someone listen and I've had a lot of shame about my body, not about my disability, but about my body.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

And it really has been a case of just not just taken the first step to take the first step and sort of put yourself out there, I think is the thing that's the hardest thing to do, because you know, I'm sure as you've had experience with negative media and negative a lot of negative media, how disheartening it can be and how terrible it can be.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

But also that connection, like you and I have connected because of somebody that I told my story to. You know what I mean? That's and now I feel like I've got another ally that no experience and knows what it's like, you know. And I have another I mean, I've met you 10 minutes and I was already asking you for help because that to me, that's the essence of

what a community is and whether that's a disability community, the black community, whatever, you know, where the community is.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

If we feel that connection with someone, it worries you.

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Bernard Namok

Yeah, because I, I only heard your first part of the yarn that you did and that part about that public transport. Yeah. And then, and then I started having all these flashbacks, you know, of me in year five up on the islands, waiting for my grandma to come around and, you know, like and then that and then that next thing I remembered was my mum having to leave and walk around in that backpack full of \$50 notes.

00:24:39:20 - 00:24:45:24

Bernard Namok

Yeah. Just from listening to your part of your first half of the job that you did. Its weird hey.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

I think those, those little moments of what, you know, help people. I really do want. Yeah. One of the biggest things that I feel is that I'm the only person that feels like this, but I'm really not. There's like a million other people that feel the same way as I do. It's just finding that connection. And like you said, finding that right spot to be like, Oh yeah, I connect with that.

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

E Yeah, but also the joyful connections, you know, not just the hard traumas was in there, but what an amazing connection you had with your grandmother and what an amazing thing to see her be able to prepare food and, you know, have those really simple, not simple, fundamental thing about life, you know, really things that make you feel good on the inside when you remember them.

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Bernard Namok

And if there's more listening to this yarn and having, you know, like just having doubts or don't know where to go, what direction, you know, like what would you say to them?

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Renay Barker-Moulholland

Ah, honestly, I would direct them to to you fullas. I'd direct them to mob controlled, let's put it in a they'll understand to their local community find someone in their community. And if that community is online, that's okay too. It doesn't have to be in person, it's just making that connection with somebody. But yeah, definitely People's Disability Network. I know Auntie June just knowing that she's part of that and that you're part of that network.

00:26:33:19 - 00:26:46:23

Renay Barker-Moulholland

I think what I'm trying to say is it doesn't really matter who you reach out to, but reach out to someone. And if you get knocked back or if it's not what you need, it doesn't matter. It doesn't, you know, I just try.

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Bernard Namok

Good.

00:26:47:17 - 00:27:11:07

Renay Barker-Moulholland

Yes. Like, I don't know if I'll use a metaphor when you buy clothes right off the rack. They're all designed for one person. There's one person. I take the measurements of that person. They don't fit them. So your uncle's like that got shortened after he had that accident or, you know, they don't fit him for you, sister. Who's got one boob that's bigger than the other?

00:27:11:07 - 00:27:35:13

Renay Barker-Moulholland

Like it's just a one size fits all. So don't be afraid to look for or to go. That might not fit me perfectly, but let's see if we can. So just use it until we can get to the next part, Adaptability, I think, is what I'm getting at which we're already really good at. I think we're all natural storytellers, too, and that.

00:27:35:16 - 00:27:35:21

Bernard Namok

We.

00:27:36:09 - 00:28:00:24

Renay Barker-Moulholland

Never underestimate the power of listening to someone story and believing them. I think that's what I would tell anyone listening to. If you think you're disabled and you're not sure whether you should say you are disabled, you are. You know, this idea of listening to people or people with around negative media and comments and things like that. My mom had a really great saying.

00:28:00:24 - 00:28:23:17

Renay Barker-Moulholland

So those who believe no proof is necessary and for those who don't believe no proof is possible. So, you know, there's going to be people out there that will hate you no matter what you do. And there's going to be people out there that love you no matter what you do, so you know, and remind yourself through, you know, who you are connected to the oldest living culture in the entire world.

00:28:23:23 - 00:28:29:17

Renay Barker-Moulholland

If that's not something to be amazed and proud about, I don't know what is.

00:28:29:17 - 00:29:00:06

Bernard Namok

Thank to Renee Barker Mullholland for sharing her family 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 one three Young on 1390 276 or beyondblue on one 300 double to 4636 or lifeline on 13 1114. Thanks for listening to Yarning Disability. I'm your host Bernard Namok Junior.

00:29:00:18 - 00:29:13:07

Bernard Namok

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