ANTHONY: So, folks, welcome back. The next session is a very exciting one. It’s the one that often draws a lot of attention at Pathways when we get the chance to hear the voice of students. So today I’m really delighted to welcome Graeme Innes, who will be chairing this panel with our four students and Graeme will introduce the students shortly but, firstly, let me introduce Graeme. Graeme Innes AM is a lawyer, author and company director. His autobiography, Finding a Way, achieved popular acclaim in 2016. He has been a human rights practitioner for more than 30 years and is a conference presenter and facilitator. Graeme was a Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission for nine years, responsible for issues relating to disability, race and human rights. Graeme led the merger of four blindness agencies to form Vision Australia. And chaired the board of that agency. He is currently the Chair of the Attitude Foundation, a start-up and at using media to change attitudes towards Australians with disabilities. Graeme was awarded an AM for his work on the development of the Disability Discrimination Act, was a finalist for Australian of the year, and on the international stage he was a member of the Australian delegation that participated in negotiating the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. He was awarded honorary doctorates by the University of Canberra in 2014, RMIT University in 2016, University of New South Wales in 2017, and Edith Cowan University in 2018. Graeme, I think that's four PhDs in four years. That must be a record. In Graeme's recognition of Graeme's work as a human rights activist and I'm delighted to welcome Mr Graeme Innes.

GRAEME: Well thanks very much, Anthony. And it's great to be back at the Pathways Conference and can I welcome the session. And I think I should be very clear that the doctorates are honorary doctorates. So it's not that I studied four PhDs in four years. That would have been - would indeed have been a record achievement. I would like to begin this session of the conference by acknowledging the traditional owners of the lands from which I'm speaking to you today, the Bundjalung people in northern New South Wales, but also to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands from which all of you are coming. And in my acknowledgement I would just like to recognise the fact that the Disability Royal Commission had a particular focus in its hearing last week on Aboriginal people, First Nations people with disabilities, and many participated in that hearing and many others watched that hearing. That must have caused great pain and trauma for our First Nations' colleagues and I wanted to acknowledge the impact of that, the contribution that all made both at the hearing and in submissions that you have made to the Commission, and express the hope that though you have been through that process, particularly last week and in the past, the discrimination and disadvantage you've experienced in the past, express the hope that the Commission will move our country closer to being a place where everyone can belong, particularly First Nations Australians with disabilities. So it's great to be back, as I said, at the Pathways Conference. And I've worked out this afternoon that I've really got the tough gig standing between all of you and your drink and activity at the end of the conference on a Friday afternoon. I feel that's a dangerous place to be. But at least I have some friends with me to help me out. And in the person of four students. What a consultative group you Pathways people are. You have a conference for disability support staff, working in the higher education and training sector, and you actually ask students for feedback. And it's not even, you know, the usual five question survey at the end of a long phone call to a call centre. You know, the ones that most of us hang up on. It's an actual panel at your conference where you will hear from students and be able to ask them questions. So let's move to that and let me introduce the panelists on your screens. Firstly, I would like to introduce Anthony Brussow. Can you give us a wave, Anthony? Anthony is a recent mature-aged apprentice completing his Certificate III in engineering, mechanical trade maintenance at TAFE in Queensland Skills Tech and he completed that in 2019. And Anthony received disability support throughout his course as he experiences literacy and learning issues. Anthony demonstrated excellent work skills and is a role model to other new people in his trade space and to his work colleagues and he was awarded the TAFE Queensland Skills Tech General Manager's Award in 2019. So great to have you here. Thank you, Anthony. Jack Milne is our next panelist. Please give us a wave, Jack. Jack is currently in a graduate program with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's department. Great place to work. And also doing a graduate diploma in migration law and practice at Australian Catholic University. Jack has a Bachelor of Commerce from Swinburne and has studied international relations and economics at Oriel College, Oxford. He also has a Bachelor of Science. And Jack is clearly a well qualified man. And he is passionate about the disability cause and disability inclusive development. Thirdly, Beth Radulski, please give us a wave. Beth is an autism and neurodiversity activist conducting a PhD on autism masking, and as well working as the project officer neurodiversity at La Trobe University. How good is that, that a university has that project officer role on its staff. And Beth, I'm looking forward to hearing your contribution today and I am sure you will tell us in a moment a little bit more about the study that you're doing and the work that you're doing. And finally, Ryan Baker. Give us a wave, Ryan. Ryan is studying a diploma of community services at Queensland TAFE and he aims to - he would like to form a statewide advisory panel for better community access for people with disabilities. What a great idea, Ryan, and I hope you're successful in that aspiration. So let's get straight to the questions that I've got for the panel because I want to make sure that we have time for those questions and time for your questions as well. Let me start - and I will take each of you to this question: why did you choose to study in your particular area? Anthony, can we start with you, please?

ANTHONY: Yes. I chose to study in my area because that is what I enjoyed doing - as like assembling parts and manufacturing parts and that. And that's - that offered me all of that.

GRAEME: Mmm. Well, that's great, thanks, Anthony. And it's really important to be doing what you enjoy. I think a lot of us have learned that in our careers, so that was a smart choice. Let's go to you, Beth. Why did you choose your particular area of study?

BETH: I chose to study autism after doing a degree in sociology and gender studies, and seeing the benefits of representation learning from lecturers from various gender sexuality, ethnic/racial backgrounds and how that enriched my education. So as an autistic person I wanted to see how subjectivity and lived experience can benefit autism research.

GRAEME: Yeah. An interesting comparison, Beth. Thank you for that. Jack, how about you? Why did you choose your area of study?

JACK: As I'm currently studying a graduate diploma of Australian migration law I believe that migration will contribute to rebuilding Australia's economy in the future and that refugees can have an important role in shaping the world that we live in. Thank you.

GRAEME: Thanks, Jack. That's great. That's a passion I share with you. I think we realise the skills and the passion of refugees and that's something we need to change so I’m pleased that you’re putting a reference into that. And, Ryan, how about you, why did you choose your particular area?

RYAN: I chose my particular area because of my passion in relation to being able to get people to have fair and equal access throughout all areas of life and throughout the community in general.

GRAEME: Thanks, Ryan. I'm so engaged with all you - what all you guys are talking about, because they're all such important issues and, you know, we will have a better Australia if we can move in those directions. So I'm going to throw the next question to you first, Beth. What impact did your disability have on your studies? And I'm interested in both positive and negative impacts.

BETH: Thank you for asking about the positive and negative impacts because most people phrase it as a negative question. I think there - - -

GRAEME: I know, let's not.

BETH: I think there were a lot of impacts. I guess I will start off with the negative and go to the positive to finish on a positive note but in terms of negative impacts, I want - I'm more interested in talking about how my - how being disabled by an inaccessible environment and classrooms affected my education. It meant that I couldn't be included in spaces the same way that my peers could. So I found classrooms over stimulating. I found campus over stimulating and I found it very difficult to relate to my peers in environments that made it difficult for me to engage with them. But in terms of positive impacts, I found that taking a strengths-based approach meant that I could use some of my autistic skillsets to benefit my education. So niche expertise and hyperfocus, systematising skills made me a great researcher and are still benefitting my academic career today.

GRAEME: Thanks, Beth. That's great. Jack, let's go to you. What were the positive and negative impacts of your disability in your study?

JACK: Mine is more of an honest observation, that the three areas that my disability has impacted my study has been, firstly, that there has been difficulties with my communication, whether written, verbal or just generally reading text, as it's quite ready heading law. Secondly, lack of awareness of my dyslexia amongst family and friends throughout high school which meant there were limited resources for me to overcome any potential learning barriers that I was facing at the time. And thirdly was the lack of a safe and inclusive environment due to being misunderstood and sometimes bullied for my mental health and learning challenges that I was regularly facing. Thank you.

GRAEME: Great, Jack. Thank you. Ryan, what are your thoughts on this question?

RYAN: Yeah. I think for the most part my disability has really given me an advantage, to some degree, in the classroom, having access to a note-taker and those sorts of things were very beneficial to me in the classroom because it did mean that I could solely focus on what the facilitator was saying, and it did mean that I could just worry about the kind of class interaction, I suppose, rather than trying to figure out what notes I was going to take and what was valuable to write down, and those sorts of things. I think it has been difficult on occasions for some areas of access to get into particular buildings or rooms at times. It also has been difficult at times for any sort of physical activities, and stuff like that, but with reasonable adjustments, which is done very well by all of my facilitators, that barrier has been somewhat shifted out of the road.

GRAEME: Yeah. And Ryan, did you find that you had a lot more friends because they wanted to borrow the notes that your note-taker took for you?

RYAN: Well, I did have a few of those times where there would be people who wanted to borrow notes, and it really depended on the person and how much effort I thought they were putting in as to whether I gave those notes over. If they were putting in effort and genuinely getting stuck, then I would generally give them over, but if they're not, then I generally wouldn't give them over.

GRAEME: That's a far more appropriate approach, Ryan. I remember when I was at university, I used to sell my notes for beer. So, you know, it's great that you took that approach. Jack - sorry, Anthony, yeah, what were your thoughts in regard to this question?

ANTHONY: Well, I had reading – a battle with reading and writing in it. So my support - he helped me a lot in that so I could concentrate in the class and keep up with the class. But my strengths is building stuff and making stuff and that, which lifted me up and it gave me a lot of confidence because I knew this is easy for me to go and do. But when it came to reading and writing and that, they helped me so much.

GRAEME: Sure. Sure. Yeah. If you know that - if you're studying something that you know you're good at making things, people shake their heads at me and I'm not trying to make any comparisons with you because I actually love making ready to assemble furniture. I find it a very pleasant pastime. But some people struggle. They get past opening the IKEA box and don't want to go any further. So I certainly appreciate what you're saying, Anthony. Jack, let me come - sorry - yeah, let me come to you with the next question, Jack. What support did you receive when you were studying, or what support have you received and how has that benefitted you? And what support have you received that really didn't - wasn't of assistance?

JACK: All right. So throughout primary school the primary sources of support that I received was through speech therapy and physiotherapy just to build up my coordination skills and just to be able to do physical exercises. Luckily I was quite good at football, as in soccer.

GRAEME: Right.

JACK: And sport was a great vehicle to make me fit in with the local - making friends and accepted in the wider school community.

GRAEME: Yep.

JACK: Secondly, throughout high school or secondary school, reasonable adjustments such as separate writing room and extra writing time were the only things that were really implemented throughout my later years. However, I did also receive a scholarship that recognised for people that had succeeded through particular hardship and difficulties, and this particular scholarship gave me sort of a bit of motivation that I can - to go on to that next stage which was going on to TAFE. And during TAFE and university, what was a common theme was to build regular contact with my tutors and lecturers and wider academic staff. One of them is actually in attendance today who I'm very thankful for. I also got extra reading and writing times during examinations. Sometimes printed notes, particularly on blue paper, which was sometimes easier to read. And there was a bit of leniency about spelling and grammar. But above all these sort of points a big thing that had really helped me that I was able to develop a strong support network which was able to help me reach my full potentially and more importantly has helped me in my career and advocacy to help other students with a disability get support and make that transition from education to employment.

GRAEME: Mmm. Yeah, support networks, peer support is such a critical thing, isn’t it? I certainly - early on in my career. Thank you, Jack. Ryan, what about you? What supports worked for you? What supports didn't work so well?

RYAN: I guess the support that really worked well for me has been, obviously, the reasonable adjustment and allowing the use of technology to get assessments and stuff done. Sometimes the physical aspects of assessments and stuff were a little bit difficult. So that could create a problem. Initially, my first note-taker was someone who did things manually on pieces of paper. That kind of stuff was not really all that beneficial to me, just because I have difficulty in moving pieces of paper and stuff around. So it was much easier when, after the first three or four years, we shifted to an online-based typing of the notes on the computer because they are easier to manage. The support in the study coaching and stuff, while I didn't need that often, it was good to have those sorts of things there so that I could then be able to have some more evidence to come to my teacher if I needed to get an extension for some reason or something like that.

GRAEME: Thanks, Ryan. Anthony, what did you find worked for you and what wasn't so useful in terms of supports?

ANTHONY: My supports, I had somebody with me, and that's what helped me so much because a lot of times I battled with spelling and that. He was there, I would tell him something and he would write it down. So that helped me so much and all my teachers and that, they knew my disability. So they all were willing to help me. And so that - so I got into TAFE very well because everybody were there, they wanted to help you. Because if you put effort in, they give it back.

GRAEME: Beth, lastly, let's come to you.

BETH: So the things that didn't work for me, I think it's important for context to say that I didn't disclose that I'm autistic to my university until my PhD. And I had done my entire undergraduate, honours, and already been teaching there by that point. So during that period what didn't work for me was the expectation that I had to disclose to get reasonable adjustments because I didn't feel that the culture was necessarily safe. I didn't know. And I didn't know how people would take that. I didn't know if I could get an honours supervisor or a PhD supervisor if they knew I was autistic. So what has worked is sort of unconventional, admittedly, but it's focusing on changing the culture at the university so that it's actually safer to disclose and I'm really lucky in my role because I get to deliver professional development workshops and allied training for neurodiversity and train academics and student-facing staff on how to engage in a culturally sensitive way with students who are in neurodiverse cohorts. So that has been very helpful. And the more I've done that, the safer I felt to not only disclose that I'm autistic but to be autistic and use fidget toys and other adjustments that I might need to participate in those spaces.

GRAEME: That's a really important point, Beth, for people with hidden disabilities. Because, you know, you don't get a second shot with disability. Once you disclose, you've disclosed. You can't sort of take it back, change your mind and go in in a different direction. So you've got to be really comfortable, haven't you, in order to take that step. And your way of doing that is a very interesting one. Have you got broader thoughts on the whole question of disclosure around people with hidden disabilities or around people who are autistic?

BETH: Can you clarify; broader in what sense?

GRAEME: You described the impact for you and that was a very powerful story you told. I'm thinking about whether your study has shown you, and your job, to be frank, has shown you what the macro impacts are, whether there are different impacts around disclosure for people with other disabilities. That was the point of my questions.

BETH: Right. So my study is very early stages in terms of participant study so I can't really report anything there quite yet, unfortunately. But I think more broadly, it's just important to keep in mind that disability is really deeply intersectional and experienced differently by each person. So I think a good example to summarise would be to say one of the questions we're now looking at adding into professional development training is instead of people making assumptions when a student discloses that they're disabled or autistic or whatever they might be disclosing, to not assume what that means for them but to say, you know, what does that mean to you? And can you explain to me what that means to you? How can I support you with and thank you for trusting me with that information. So, yeah, change the narrative, I guess, and let people learn from the lived experience of the individual.

GRAEME: Thank you for that, Beth. Because it is - the intersectionality is so critical. The other thing about disability is that it's also deeply individual. So the impact of disclosing, you know, the pressure to disclose or the decision not to disclose can be very varied for different people. So it will be interesting to see what your study brings out in that respect. Let me come to you now, Ryan. If you had your time again, in terms of your study, how would you improve support for either yourself or more broadly for students with disabilities?

RYAN: How would I improve? I think, basically, I would be encouraging people to talk, I suppose. I know Beth just brought up a concern about disclosing and having concerns about what the impact of that may be on a broad scale. But I have always found that in order to get your support that's necessary, you need to be able to talk to all stakeholders involved, and you need to be able to describe what it is particularly that you need in order to get the stuff you want to or need to get done. Not saying anything or not being able to talk to people kind of, from my experience anyway, leaves you trapped in a bubble where you can't really get what you need to get done in the conventional way, and because nothing has been said, nobody knows how to support you. Quite often, what happens is people want to support but they don't know how, and because disability is such an individualised thing, it really requires people to speak on an individual level.

GRAEME: That's very valuable. Anthony, what are your thoughts? What would you change if you had your study time over again?

ANTHONY: I would - I think I would speak up a lot so that they understand my situation. And to be able to help me. Because what actually happens a lot of times we're too scared. We're too afraid to speak up. And that's the biggest thing. If we talk about stuff and they get you to understand, you get all the help that you need.

GRAEME: Beth, you've covered some of this question, but what are your thoughts, if you had your time again, what would you - what would you do differently?

BETH: I think in my case I might disclose slightly earlier than I did. I didn't disclose during my honours year, and I spent a lot of time feeling frustrated in seminars and tutorials, and not feeling like I was clear on what the expectations were with my supervisors. And I think had I been able to disclose to them and talk about some more structured support and how I communicate and how they communicate and how we could find middle ground, that would have pretty profoundly changed the experiences that I had in my honours year. So I'm glad I have been able to do that for my PhD and that was definitely something I learned the hard way the first time around.

GRAEME: You're confident, haven’t you, that you're going to get that reaction. So it's tough. It's a tough call. Jack, what about you? What would you change or improve if you had your time again?

JACK: It's a very good question. In a short answer, there would be nothing that I would change about it because I like to think within our own disability that we have that people will see us, not because of our disability but our ability to learn and to commit to a course and see it through beginning to the end, that we are resilient and determined creatures that want to get the best out of ourselves and that we often want to work in teams, maybe, in assignments and get the best possible grades. And that we care for each other. And these particular values that we have as people with disabilities, I wouldn't change that at all, and it's something that over time I've just learned to accept because I know that I've got an ability and I like to think that other people can go beyond their own - be out looking and thinking about their own abilities of where they can contribute to Australia as a whole and find their purpose. Thank you.

GRAEME: Look, this has been a really rich conversation so far, and thank you to all of you for contributing to it. But I don't want you to assume that it's coming to an end because it's not but I do want to mention that for all you out there virtually at the conference, there's an opportunity for you to ask questions. So if you could put those questions in the chat, I'm not listening to the chat because I want to focus my ears on listening to the students talking on the panel, but we have someone who is paying attention to the chat and she will come forward with some questions in just a few moments time. So now is a great opportunity if you have a burning question to put to any of these students. If you want to mention a particular person that the question is for, that's fine. But also if you just have a general question, please put it in the chat. Let me come to the next question that I've got here - and, again, I'm going to start with you, Anthony. What advice would you give other students or potential students with disabilities in terms of people considering doing the sort of courses that you've undertaken?

ANTHONY: I think find out what's available for you, and then work very hard towards it.

GRAEME: Good advice. Keep your eyes on the prize. Great piece of advice, Anthony. Beth, what about you?

BETH: I think I would advise students who want to undertake postgraduate study - and maybe this is a bit of a niche answer - but being in social sciences if you were looking at exploring a social sciences degree and you identify as disabled, I think there is a lot more room in various fields within disability studies for additional research-based in subjectivity lived experience, and the expertise that comes from not only living it daily but reading research and being able to critically engage with what research is saying right now and contribute to those discussions and discourses. So if you're from a social sciences background and you're not quite sure what you want to study, consider doing something that can draw on that expertise that you have.

GRAEME: Give yourself a head start. What a good sort. Thanks, Beth. Jack, what about you? What advice would you give to others thinking about embarking on study?

JACK: Four points. The first is to build a supportive network that can be other students that you're studying with, it can be the academic staff, the students support adviser or just getting involved in the local community groups, they've got a wealth of experience that you can maybe tap into or expertise that you maybe want to have a career in. So there's an untapped source of potential through your networks. And also through the support network, get yourself - have a digital presence, get on LinkedIn and Twitter and just engage in conversations where you could meet like-minded individuals, in a global environment where you can meet anyone from London through Delhi or Nairobi. The world is so wide now that we can reach this expertise and experience. The second piece of advice that I want to touch on is technology. That we live in the 21st century and that there's - we've got to just embrace technology, whether it's just what we can get the software on to our computers or actually use on our phones. And that can be accessed anywhere and at any time. The more that we embrace this, the more that it can help us reach our full potential using it as a vehicle of our abilities. The third piece of advice is to remain outward looking. And think about our own studies and our careers, what it means to the bigger picture, more importantly what it means for our life and our career. And where you can have your ability to leave a legacy for others moving forward, and an example was that I helped run a campaign for the Commonwealth Secretary in 2016 for young people with disabilities, and it has still got its legacy today when it ran its second-year conference in Antiga last year and at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting that heads of state agreed to remove the stigma of people with disabilities. And earlier this year - a couple of months ago, sorry, that the children and youth with disability Australian advocacy organisation had a youth Summit. So that comes to my final point, what advice I would give to students is to focus on serving others. Disability individuals can only win if we support one another and not just people with disabilities but also people with disabilities. That if we can live in a culture and a society where empathy is at the core, we can have a future that is more inclusive and more accessible. And more welcome to inclusion in the future. Thank you.

GRAEME: Excellent advice. Thank you, Jack. I have a friend who does exactly what you do. Which is you ask him a question or he's doing a presentation and he says I have four points. And he has got his points organised and it helps him to remember them and take people through them in a logical order. It's a great technique. Tell me quickly, Jack, did you get to go to Antiga last year?

JACK: No, I didn't. I've been fortunate in the last couple of years to present at CHOGM, where I presented at the very first children and youth with disability roundtable discussion. Then a couple of months later I got to go to the global disability Summit, which was sponsored by the International Disability Alliance and the Kenyan and UK government, where I got to present in a discussion with a wombat in my hand. And I won a scholarship later that year to go to one young world which is a global youth conference where I was one of the five recipients around the world with a disability to win. Then last year I got to speak at the Australian network on disability national conference, who are a great organisation to be a part of, which I encourage any students to be a part of. Great for mentoring or internships. I got to present at the Commonwealth – sorry. The UN Convention and state parties conference last year where I launched a Commonwealth children's and youth disability network and I have done a little bit in this space, pretty much. But, yeah, hopefully in the next few years I can make sure that disability inclusion and disability development is core into my future work both in public sector and advocacy. Thank you.

ELICIA: Elicia here, Graeme. We have quite a few questions coming through. Please let me know when you would like to move on to audience questions.

ANTHONY: Elicia, it looks like we've lost Graeme at the moment. So would you like to proceed with the questions that are in the Q&A now?

ELICIA: Thanks, Anthony, I can sure do that. So the question with the most votes is to all students: we are currently reviewing the branding of the service at our university. Do any of you have a preference when seeking support as to what the name of the service is? For example, would it be easier for you to know where to seek assistance if the name was Disability Services, or would you equally find the service if it were known as Accessibility Services. Beth, would you like to start?

BETH: Sure. I'm happy to start. This is a tricky question because I think it depends on the individual. In an individual sense, I do identify as disabled and I see that as part of my social identity. So I'm happy to use that term. But a lot of people don't identify as disabled, particularly in the neurodiversity community and from what I've heard from other colleagues at other universities, some students find that a deterrent because, again, they're worried about the stigma that is associated with the term "disability" and the ableism that they feel can happen as a result of that. So I think in terms of broad accessibility, accessibility is good. That's what we use at La Trobe. And I like it quite a lot. So, yeah.

ELICIA: Thanks, Beth. What about you, Ryan? Do you have a preference?

RYAN: I don't really mind too much the term "disability" per se. The one that I really want to get rid of out of our vernacular is "special needs", that one grinds my gears like - to no end. Accessibility support is fine, individual support needs is also fine. I like the term "individual" because it doesn't really identify in one way or another whether there's any form of disability per se. But that's just my personal preference.

ELICIA: Thanks, Ryan, and that's a great point about the term "special needs", it's certainly one we still see around a little bit too often, I think. Jack, do you have a preference for the naming of services at universities?

JACK: I like to think of the term abilities just because with being Clark Kent with the glasses on that we've all got a special ability that we can contribute and add value towards. And by using the word "abilities", that can help us reach our full potential or in my case, look like Clark Kent.

ELICIA: Fantastic. Thanks, Jack. Nice and strengths-based response there too. Anthony, what are your views on this?

ANTHONY: My views is help support and that because, as I said, when you have disability, everyone looks at you differently. But I didn't really have a preference, as long as it's a learning process that we can read - that we can access easily.

ELICIA: Thank you, Anthony. Graeme, I can see that you've rejoined us now. It's Elicia here. I've just started asking some audience questions. Would you like to resume with your questions or would you like me to continue with questions from the audience? Okay. Elicia again, we might continue with audience questions while Graeme is just getting his audio set up. The next question we have is for Beth, but equally happy for others to jump in if you have a view on this. The question Beth is: what tips could you suggest to us as practitioners and our respective institutions regarding making disclosure safe for students?

BETH: Okay. So that's a wonderful question. And I am going to paste a link into the chat box and plug some of the work we've done at La Trobe. We've actually developed a neurodiversity toolkit with resources in relation to cultural sensitivity, accessible event planning checklists, and DIY sensory room and neurodiversity 101 for introduction for people who aren't familiar with the concept. So we use those resources as a sort of entry point to make disclosure safer for neurodiverse cohorts, and I think some of them are more broadly applicable as well. And I'm quite happy for other people to answer for areas that I might not cover in my particular expertise.

ELICIA: Thanks so much, Beth. That's great that you've been able to share a link for us as well. Jack, did you have anything you would like to add on how to make disclosure safe for students?

JACK: I think a very strong group that we need to maybe - in terms of disclosure and the safety environment for students with disability are particularly women with disabilities, how they're probably more vulnerable compared to us men, and that there could be an increased behaviour of where they're under threat, and could occur through just more harassment or sexual abuse. So they could be misled that they've got a disability because it might be hidden. So we need to make sure that particularly women that have disabilities are protected and their own sexual rights are protected and make sure that there are support groups and welfare groups can maintain their privacy during this particular time. And the second area is to think about what the online space, that there's more online predators and cyber security which can harm and impact people's lives, through mental health or mental challenges. So we need to really adapt to who are the marginalised individuals, and most vulnerable whether it's women or people from ethnic backgrounds or LGBTQI groups, that we need to make sure we're looking at disability as a whole person, not just someone with a disability but another facet. And that technology, as I said earlier, is very accessible. We need to make sure that people's rights are protected virtually, or in a university campus but also virtually on their profiles, as these can be easily targeted for people with disabilities.

ELICIA: Thanks, Jack.

JACK: Thank you.

ELICIA: In the interests of time I'm going to move to our next question. And I will ask that first to Anthony and then to Ryan. So Anthony, have you found that academics or teachers have had issues with providing you with alternate assessments if and when required?

ANTHONY: No, they've actually worked with me and worked very well. Because once you speak to them, they're there to help you.

ELICIA: Great, thanks, Anthony. What about you, Ryan, have you found that academics and teachers have had any issues with providing alternate assessments if required?

RYAN: No, I haven't really had any difficulty in being able to get the teachers to provide more individualised support. I think the toughest part for me has always been the deadlines, I suppose, because I'm someone who has always wanted to stay within the deadlines, to be able to keep up with my peers, but I haven't always been able to do that, and the tough part has been that the teachers can only go so far when it comes to extensions, particularly within a semester because they have deadlines themselves. So I suppose that has been the trickiest part for me.

ELICIA: That's great, Ryan. And there's a comment that has followed that question which is that: It's an excellent question for discussion because at times it would see that some educators possibly see adjustments or alternative assessments as an advantage to the student registered with the disability. Beth, did you want to make any comment against that question or the following comment?

BETH: Can you ask the question again, please?

ELICIA: Sure. I'm sorry. So the original question was: Have you found that academics or teachers have had any issues with providing you with alternate assessments if and when required. And then the follow-up comment was that, at times it would seem some educators possibly see adjustments or alternative assessments as advantage to the student registered with disability.

BETH: I - as I've kind of touched on, I didn't seek reasonable adjustments for most of my education, but there have been certain times - I actually had a supervision last week where I was having a non-speaking episode and I had to request the option to type during the meeting because I was finding verbal processing just way too difficult. And my supervisors responded very well to that. I think - I think there can be - I think there can be difficulties, intentions among student cohorts more than academics in my experience. I think sometimes, particularly when you're in, you know, a very high achieving cohort in postgraduate studies, for example, and maybe it's partly my experience as well because I do sometimes pass as non-autistic, so I think some people could tend to question, you know, like, are you really autistic or are you autistic enough to need reasonable adjustments. So that can be an issue. But I think, yeah, as a sociologist, I'm so sorry but I’m just going to shamelessly give the culturally sociologically answer, it all comes back to culture and how we educate people and change the predominant cultural views in order to better cater to individuals.

ELICIA: Fantastic. Thanks, Beth. I might follow on from your response there with another question that's come through from the audience. This person has said, "Beth, it is great that you are building awareness with La Trobe staff. Do you think it is now safe for people to disclose, or are we still in a time where not all educators are aware and inclusive?”

BETH: I think it's really hard to make a broad generalisation. I think change is one of those things that happens very slowly. And we're making things better and less problematic, and it's going to be, you know, a constant journey, and I don't want to give the impression that I think we're done. It's something we need to keep working towards. And in the same way that we're having big conversations around the world in terms of, you know, socio-economic equality, racial equality, gender equality, these aren't fast-moving changes. They require each individual to constantly reflect on what they're doing, what they could be doing better, how much they still need to learn. So I think, yeah0, I don't think we will any time soon be at a point where it is just safe for everybody and, again, that's going to be intersectional too. But we need to just keep working towards that. And acknowledging that it's not just catering to an individual who is disabled and responding to their needs but it's actually about a social justice issue more broadly.

ELICIA: Thanks, Beth. I will open that question up to the rest of our student panel. Jack, Anthony, or Ryan, would any of you like to jump in and respond to the question of whether or not it is now safe for people to disclose - I will broaden it and say their disability - or are we still in a time when not all educators are aware and inclusive?

RYAN: I would say from my experience that it is a relatively safe environment but I would preface it by backing up Beth's point in saying that it is, like everything else, a continual actual work in progress. We can't stop at any point because as soon as we take our eye off the prize, as soon as we take our foot off the gas, from my experience in most cases throughout life, we have a tendency to slip back and slipping back is the last thing we want to do.

ELICIA: Thanks, Ryan. Anthony or Jack, would you like to respond to that question?

ANTHONY: I would like to respond to it. At TAFE and at learning colleges, it's all very well good. But as soon as you're out in the workplace, then it becomes a different issue because that's when everybody run amok and think that you haven't got it. So that's the biggest downfall is in the workplace because people aren't educated enough in your workplace.

ELICIA: Great point, Anthony. Jack, how have you found that issue around, particularly in the workplace that Anthony has raised?

JACK; I think it's definitely improving, particularly in my department, that we emphasise the importance of inclusive culture and we like to be a reflection of Australian society. But I think with individuals like Graeme, who has been a champion for many years, and Allison McEwan and Ben Gautlett, to - we've had a few leaders that have contributed to this space, Cara Finlay is another – off the top of my head - what's her name, Tilley Ashton if you look at more historically, that Australia has got leaders that are in the disability space who are good role models to break down those sort of barriers and stigmas of people with a visible disability or a nondisability, and with these leaders being present in everyday life that will create safer spaces where people can bring their full self to where they are, whether it's in the workplace or in schooling, because we just need to be - create a culture that is empathetic but also for us to have the confidence with a disability to be open and honest of the challenges that we have just as much as the glitz and glamour of having a disability, that our story should be shared and be discussed because it can only bring awareness to the cause. Thank you.

ELICIA: Fantastic, Jack. Thank you. I am just aware of time. We do just have another minute left of this panel session. I would like to close by asking each of our panelists to consider or just to give us a couple of thoughts on - in terms of what Jack was saying, in terms of telling your stories, in terms of making sure your thoughts and your experiences are heard and included in policy making and in practice at all training and education institutions. What do you consider to be the most effective way to make sure you are heard and included and represented in those policies and practices? And Ryan, I might ask you to go first.

RYAN: I would consider the most effective way in spaces like this, I suppose, because I really firmly believe that for huge communal and kind of sociological change to occur, it has to come from a community and a societal-based level. Where lots and lots of people are gathering and expressing their thoughts and ideas so that we can get better outcomes for the collective by hearing each other's perspective, basically.

ELICIA: Great thoughts, Ryan. Anthony, your thoughts?

ANTHONY: Sorry. I think that you've got to be very open, and honest. And then the people will see and then you get the best out of people.

ELICIA: Thanks, Anthony. And Jack, what are your thoughts on how best to be represented in policy and practice?

JACK: I'm trying to think of what lens I can talk about this through. I think just that we need to have more platforms and that we need to empower people with the ability to become strong enough advocates where they can support one another and speak on the same platform. And by creating the same platform we need to create multiple platforms across different facets of our life and society, and that we need to sometimes take risks or take challenges to turn them into opportunities where we can have a platform where we can share our voice. It's not really a policy but more just a domino effect of what we can achieve, the importance of just continuing to support one another I think is a powerful vehicle to ensure this momentum is to be continued for many years ahead.

ELICIA: Thanks, Jack. I agree. More platforms, more opportunities and more empowerment to self-advocate. Beth, last word to you.

BETH: I think one of the most powerful ways of being not just sort of heard but listened to is to promote - I think it's for the external community, the non-disabled community, to promote leadership from within the disabled community, and to ensure that, you know, whether you're a researcher and you're co-designing a project with, you know, autistic people instead of just seeking autistic participants, you know, what does the community want? Does the research project respond to those needs? If you're in disability support, making sure that if you have focus groups or projects or initiatives or policy reform, you're letting that be led by disabled people. And if you are someone who is privileged and abled and more senior in your career and you have the opportunity to platform those voices and empower those voices, give that opportunity because leadership is so important, and it goes so far beyond the little nod of, "We've consulted and included", and leadership is the next frontier, I think.

ELICIA: Fantastic, Beth. And what a powerful way to finish on the notion of people with disability in positions of leadership. Now, I am conscious of time. I want to say thank you to all of our student panel. There are some wonderful comments in the chat box if you are able to access those. If you can't see those, please let us know and we'll make sure that they're sent through to you because everyone is definitely appreciating having your experience you have shared with us this afternoon. Before I hand over to Cathy and Anthony to close our Pathways15 conference, I do notice that our inaugural life member, Trevor Allan, has his hand up. Trevor, I'm just going to unmute you if you did want to say something.

TREVOR: Hi everyone. Look, I just wanted to say thank you to all the panelists for a very insightful session. You guys - you are the ultimate arbiters of how effective the services are and the insights that you have provided today are going to be extremely valuable for everybody so thank you very much. I'm not actually working in the sector anymore but the kind of contribution you guys are making is going to be very helpful for everybody who has heard them today. So thank you.

ELICIA: Thanks, Trevor. And now over to you, Cathy and Anthony, to close out the Pathways15 Online conference.

ANTHONY: Thanks, Elicia. And here is Cathy. So I will shortly hand over to Cathy and I would just like to thank everyone for attending, for the opportunity of being the Emcee here at Pathways, sharing that joy with Elicia, and thank you to our four students who have given us the honour of their attendance today. And Jack, since I've watched you as an undergraduate student, it's been an absolute honour to watch your career progress. So congratulations.