



Journey to independence

Episode 2 from the Life My Way series

Fiona

Hi everyone and thanks for listening to Visibility, the monthly podcast produced by CID, The Council for Intellectual Disability. Here we will be telling our stories and exploring some of the issues that impact people with intellectual disability. To find out more about our work, visit www.cid.org.au

Adele

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Council for Intellectual Disability acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to the elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.00:00:04:09 –

Alex

Hello and welcome. In this series we talk to people with intellectual disability about the decisions and choices they make in their lives. This is a young woman working and living in Sydney. She's a permanent part time job she loves, she has her own rental apartment. She has a network of support that includes work, colleagues, family, friends, and social workers.

Today, Jess will share with us her life story. My name is Alex Elliot. I will be your host today. With me is my co host Tom Parker.

Tom

Thanks, Alex.

Alex

My first question is Jess what is the best decision you have ever made?

Jess

Oh, it's an interesting one. There's a lot actually. One of them is when I went to choose the job the ABC. That's a big decision.

Alex

So how did you make that decision and how did you get the support?

Jess

Job support helped me with that. And they found the ABC and they went in and the boss in news management said that she could take me in and have a meeting, like an interview and they said yes. I was very excited. I could not believe it.

Alex

Can you tell us about what you do there?

Jess

I've been at the ABC for 17 years, including this year. I do admin work so I. I do like purchasing the milk and photocopiers and the mail, makeup deliveries like sort of between mail and some washing as well and watering the plants too. So do a variety of jobs. That's long to list. I work Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Half a day.

Alex

So what do you like about working at the ABC? What makes you feel good there?

Jess

Well, I think it's a good working family to work with. They are nice work colleagues to work with and get to meet famous people as well along the way.

Tom

Who is the most famous person you have met?

Jess

When he was there I met Adam Spencer. I get to see Joe OBrien and Jeremy Fernandez too. So there is a lot to list there that I have met.

Tom

Has your role changed at all over the years? Or you still enjoy doing the same thing?

Jess

It has a little bit. There is a few tasks that have been and gone. So I have to go with new ones in my list.

Tom

Do you like change or is that something that you do not really like?

Jess

Yeah, but it takes me a while to adjust sometimes with the changes.

Alex

Since you work, you are obviously earning money. What's the nicest thing about earning money?

Jess

Going away on a holiday. Getting clothes for yourself and the food. And most importantly pay the rent. I am very happy.

Tom
What is your favourite thing to spend your money on?

Jess
Sometimes perfume sometimes nice clothes as well.

Tom
How often do you head out shopping?

Jess
Occasionally.

Tom
Who are you heading out with?

Jess
My family. I have not done much shopping with friends. I would like to.

Tom
What sort of hobbies or things you enjoy doing outside of work?

Jess
I like doing gardening with the Waverley Community Living Program. They do that sometimes on the weekend and it relaxes me, the gardening. I like it. It is a community garden so it is got a bit of like fruit and herbs all you can think of.

Tom
How long have you been going there for?

Jess
Ages. When we first started we got the plot all organized and we planted our first seeds.

Tom
So you were there from the beginning.

Jess
Mmm hmm.

Tom
Have you ever thought about travelling overseas?

Jess
By myself overseas I would not. It would be scary.

Alex
You do not have to answer this, but do you date?

Jess
Oh well not at the moment.

Tom

Have you ever had a partner in the past?

Jess

I have three exes. So I had the 1st one in 2005. That did not last long. The 2nd one same. 3rd the same. So they were all short term. And I was hoping for long.

Tom

Were you looking for a partner or did it sort of just happen naturally?

Jess

Well I have had some workshops that I went to learn about relationships and friendships.

Tom

Okay. So there is definitely something that you have thought about in the past and you have said you would like to keep exploring that?

Jess

Yes I do.

Tom

Do you head out anywhere on the weekend to try and meet someone or any online dating or anything like that?

Jess

I really do not do online dating. I prefer to do it manually. Just to be safe. Well my sister gave me some advice. I have to find the right person and hopefully they are good.

Tom

What sets the average guy apart from someone that you would want to go out with?

Jess

One that is punctual, that does not you know let me down or anything. And I like fashion as well. I do not mind if they wear suits or anything.

Tom

Care if they had a disability? No disability anything like that?

Jess

Well for someone without a disability that is sort of in a worry territory because the one without a disability they can be a bit scary if they do not understand and they may treat you bad sometimes. Not all. Not all of them. I am just saying some.

Tom

Do you see that as as a barrier for yourself?

Jess

I think so because they could do anything if they do not know or understand what I have got.

Tom

So I think it is important to be open with each other.

Jess

Yeah. So they get very supportive and then they understand.

Tom

Did your exes happen to know that you had a disability?

Jess

Oh, yeah and they had one too.

Alex

Thank stress for sharing with us. We will now take a short break and then hear more from Jess about making decisions and choices in life.

Fiona

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Alex

Welcome back to our conversation with Jess. So Jess, can you tell us about growing up? What was school like?

Jess

Glebe Primary School. That was my first school. I had good teachers there and I feel the school was very nice and it was nice and big and I make good friends.

Tom

So whereabouts did you move on to high school?

Jess

I went to St Lucys. After that I went to St Edmunds school. I stayed in my familys place at Redfern and got the train all the way to Wahroonga. I think it is half an hour.

Alex

St Lucys is a school for students with disabilities. So yeah so did you find any challenges? Anything hard?

Jess

I had to travel train to go from Redfern to Wahroonga so I needed practice and my family helped me with that. So I get used to the surroundings and where everything is. I did it all by myself after that when I got used to it. I finished with the the secondary college at Blackwater Bay campus. I finished there year 11 and 12.

Alex

And then you made the decision to live by yourself?

Jess
Yes.

Tom
Did you go through that process yourself or did you have some supporters there as well?

Jess
I got support by Waverly Council with this program called Waverley Community Living Program, and they helped me to look at places.

Tom
When you were looking at different accommodation were you given many choices to choose from?

Jess
Yes they had a list and I went to look at all of those apartments. The one before this unit was nice but it was not close to shops and public transport. So different styles that I looked at. Scary and exciting experience to see different places.

Tom
And did people come and look at the properties with you?

Jess
Yeah because I could not do that on my own. I would be very nervous. For one thing the real estate because I do not know if they are going to be pushy you know with me with an intellectual disability and autism because it is difficult when they talk fast. It is hard for me to take everything in.

Tom
So did you reach out to Waverley City Council or like how did that process sort of work?

Jess
I went to see if they had any vacancies. They were doing a trial at a place that I started living with a flatmate and they saw I went well and then I just started to you know live on my own with a flatmate. It went quick.

Alex
Who is in your family?

Jess
My mum dad and my sister.

Alex
And then how do you feel when you were moving away?

Jess
One of my family members was a bit teary. They were bit you know emotional. My mum.

Alex
Who was more nervous you or your parents?

Jess
We were both nervous.

Alex
Your family were encouraging?

Jess
Even though they were a bit worried. They said go for it to live independent.

Tom
When you moved from your family home was there anything that you found difficult or daunting?

Jess
Flatmates was a bit tricky and learning how to use petty cash together can get a bit complicated.

Tom
What about cooking and all those sort of skills?

Jess
Well the first thing I learned how to cook with the social educator that was sort of like a teacher. They actually told me how to do a stir fry first thing to cook and I got used to doing that.

Alex
How do you do the shopping?

Jess
So I do Coles online and also I do shopping locally here as well. So I try to support my local shops. So I do a bit of both.

Tom
Was was the Internet shopping something that you picked up quite easily? Like was it did you find it easy to do?

Jess
Oh it took me time and Waverly helped to set up the account and ever since I have been enjoying it.

Tom
So you are trying to build some, some life skills, I guess?

Jess
Yeah.

Tom
And gain some independence.

Jess
Yes.

Tom
Is that something that is important to you? To be independent?

Jess
Just to organize your life. I try to do that independently and to keep my house clean. I try to be on top of that.

Alex
Has there ever been any worrying moments?

Jess
I think it was this year that my sink got blocked and that was a scary moment because I thought I did something and it was not. I was trying to unblock it. Did not work. So I needed to call my family. That was scary. I do not want to slip and have an accident.

Tom
It is good that you had that support network there that you were able to reach out to. Yes. Has there been anything put in place you know of like as far as emergency plans or anything like that?

Jess
Oh yes. To go to the nearest chicken shop if there was a real fire.

Alex
When we were in COVID lockdown how did that affect you on your own?

Jess
When that first happened I could not go to work. They told me to stay home and I did Zoom with Waverly Community Living Program. It was different. My body clocks felt funny. I made sure I was safe. I wore the mask and did everything like that. And stayed at my place and then sometimes at my parents at Redfern.

Alex
Do you want to be seen as a role model or inspiration? If a person wants to live independently.

Jess
To represent and then and then explain it to people that are new?

Alex
Yeah like I want to be like Jess.

Jess

I would not mind not to tell other people about the independence.

Alex

Do you have any advice for the family members or people with disability who want to live independently?

Jess

Just go for it and see what is available for the training of living independently, if you want to live independent and you want to move out of home. Just go for it.

Alex

Thanks for sharing your story today.

Jess

My pleasure.

Tom

Thank you so much Jess. It was lovely to talk to you.

Jess

Thanks, guys.

Alex

And for everyone listening thank you as well. Join us next month when we will share more stories from people with intellectual disability about the decisions and choices they make in their lives.

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