



00:00:04:09 - 00:00:33:01

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

00:00:33:02 - 00:00:52:07

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.

00:00:52:09 - 00:00:59:03

Nigel

Listeners are advised that this podcast contains discussions about mental health and death.

00:00:59:05 - 00:01:26:16

Raylene

In this series, we talk to people with intellectual disability about the decision and the choices they make in their lives. Today's guest is Leigh, who lives in Newcastle, New South Wales, Leigh is going to tell us about living independently, being an athlete, an activist, an advocate, an animal lover and wildlife protector and much more. My name is Raylene Griffiths.

00:01:26:19 - 00:01:31:13

Raylene

I'll be your host today. With me is my co-host, Lauren Bennett.

00:01:31:18 - 00:01:32:20

Lauren

Thanks, Raylene.

00:01:32:22 - 00:01:38:08

Raylene

Welcome, Leigh, and thanks for joining us to talk about your life.

00:01:38:10 - 00:01:39:16

Leigh

Thank you.

00:01:39:18 - 00:01:44:16

Raylene

You are a very busy guy. How do you fit all your activities in?

00:01:44:18 - 00:02:08:23

Leigh

Yeah, that's a really great question. Raylene. I'm busy. I'm always out every day. I'm doing a lot of things. I do holidays. I spend time with my family. I spend time with my friends. I spend time with my support workers. I love getting into nature. So I'm pretty much out every day I'm not always at home.

00:02:09:00 - 00:02:15:11

Raylene

You grew up in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney and in Newcastle. What was your childhood like?

00:02:15:15 - 00:02:28:03

Leigh

I was born in Penrith and raised in the Blue Mountains of Springwood and growing up with Down Syndrome has its ups and downs and woes just like everyone else has in their life.

00:02:28:05 - 00:02:29:20

Raylene

How was school for you?

00:02:30:00 - 00:02:54:22

Leigh

It was good. I was in a mainframe primary when I was growing up in Springwood, but I did have a couple of problems with literacy, I used to scribble when I was a kid. I used to stutter a lot as well. Being bullied. And then when we moved Newcastle I was still in the mainframe at Belmont Primary. And then from there I was actually segregated to a special school

00:02:54:24 - 00:03:11:05

Leigh

for special needs. It was up to my mum and dad to make that decision and I think they made the right decision for me. I had the best education possible. I was School Captain of my school. And I left when I was 18 years old. So yeah.

00:03:11:07 - 00:03:15:18

Lauren

That's fantastic, Leigh. What responsibilities did you have as a school captain?

00:03:15:18 - 00:03:23:04

Leigh

Doing assemblies doing a lot of assembly speeches and stuff like that. It was awesome to be a school captain. Absolutely awesome.



00:03:23:06 - 00:03:29:07

Raylene

You grew up in the family of 4 brothers. Did you ever get up to any mischief?

00:03:29:12 - 00:03:55:21

Leigh

I did. Maybe some crazy little things here and there. Every time I got myself into trouble I used to blame my younger brother. Used to run away a lot. I got in trouble for my eldest brother for swinging on the old fashioned clothesline. Those round things. After that I decided to run away. To see my auntie and uncle, went down to the bus stop to try to catch a bus into town, to get a train into Sydney.

00:03:55:23 - 00:04:09:22

Leigh

My next door neighbors wet cement and I actually put my name initials in that. So I was a bit of a crazy person. I was a bit of an adventure person. I'm still, yeah, those crazy times.

00:04:09:24 - 00:04:13:09

Raylene

It sounds like you had a very adventurous childhood.

00:04:13:11 - 00:04:15:04

Leigh

I did, I did!

00:04:15:06 - 00:04:19:14

Lauren

Leigh, did your brothers treat you any differently because of your intellectual disability?

00:04:19:16 - 00:04:43:23

Leigh

My second oldest brother and my youngest brother treat me as one of their family. My oldest bro treats me differently because he has to be responsible for me, you know? Ever since Dad passed away, he had to be the responsible one. For some reason, I'm too much to handle. That's what he thinks. I cannot even go camping with my eldest brother.

00:04:43:23 - 00:04:52:19

Leigh

I can go camping with my youngest and my 2nd eldest. A very emotional question. But good for other people to listen to this.

00:04:52:21 - 00:04:56:16

Lauren

Thanks for sharing that, Leigh. You mentioned your dad's passing away.

00:04:56:22 - 00:04:57:06

Leigh
Yes.

00:04:57:11 - 00:05:00:24

Lauren
It happened when you were only 18. How did it affect your life?

00:05:01:04 - 00:05:33:10

Leigh
My dad passed away with a massive heart attack. I was actually there and I watched him and I couldn't do anything about it. The only thing I could do was hug him and kiss him. And say, Dad, I miss you. Definitely a mental health struggle. And then there were times I want to take my life to be with him again. It didn't happen. Some reason I was pulled out of it for my family.

00:05:33:12 - 00:05:42:06

Leigh
I have a great life to lead and I'm leading this life the way it's supposed to be. So yeah thank you.

00:05:42:08 - 00:05:46:17

Lauren
Thanks for sharing that with us. Leigh, I understand that it still must be very, very difficult.

00:05:46:21 - 00:05:48:18

Leigh
Talking about it helps me, definitely, 100%.

00:05:48:20 - 00:05:55:23

Lauren
Having gone through that, it sounds like it might have been an inspiration to live your life to the fullest.

00:05:56:03 - 00:06:04:08

Leigh
It happens to all families and you just have to enjoy life when you can. Absolutely. Thank you.

00:06:04:10 - 00:06:05:19

Lauren
Thanks Leigh.

00:06:05:21 - 00:06:18:01

Raylene

Leigh, you are so gifted and gentle and kind, but sometimes people with intellectual disability can get very angry like anyone else. Is that your experience too?

00:06:18:03 - 00:06:39:00

Leigh

A lot of people with Down syndrome do get angry and they are feeling different things in their lives. It depends on their personality and where they come from. When I get angry, you don't want to see it. Trust me. You don't want to see it, I really, I might scream I might shout lose my temper. That type of stuff, all that stuff it comes from mental health.

00:06:39:00 - 00:06:42:11

Leigh

And we all have mental health of some form.

00:06:42:13 - 00:06:51:12

Raylene

One of your many activities is powerlifting, which is lifting heavy weights in competitions. Can you tell us about that.

00:06:51:14 - 00:07:19:02

Leigh

I started when I was in my teens around 17, 18 years old. Definitely something I enjoyed doing. I won a lot of medals and, won a lot of trophies. And now getting back into it after 2 decades ago. Now I've got my first comp, which is this weekend actually on Sunday. When I powerlift I use all the all the childhood stuff, all the stuff I've been through

00:07:19:04 - 00:07:40:23

Leigh

I use that as a motivation. I'm known as The Beast. Even got this haircut. You may have seen it a mohawk that's going to be dyed pink on Friday afternoon. So I've been training for about 4 to 5 months and I can't wait to as The Beast.

00:07:41:00 - 00:07:43:10

Lauren

Oh that's amazing Leigh, good luck for the weekend.

00:07:43:12 - 00:07:49:14

Raylene

How do you feel competing as The Beast Is it a kind of release for you?

00:07:49:20 - 00:08:04:03

Leigh

It is a release for me since my dad's passing. I was in a relationship that didn't work out as well. All the things that I actually released. Anger, frustration. That's a release for me.

00:08:04:05 - 00:08:06:24

Raylene

How does it feel when you win a competition?

00:08:06:24 - 00:08:20:18

Leigh

Feels great. Feels awesome. I'm a bit of a person that I get very excited. The excitement gets the better of me sometimes, and that's just who I am. And I should be who I am every single day.

00:08:20:20 - 00:08:24:19

Lauren

So Leigh. Is there anyone special in your life at the moment?

00:08:24:21 - 00:08:46:04

Leigh

No, I'm single at the moment. But I do have this special friend that I've seen every couple of weeks or a month, but she's a friend that I call her my sis. His name's Casey, and we know each other for a long time. We worked together. But no relationship. Yeah.

00:08:46:06 - 00:08:47:00

Lauren

Are you looking?

00:08:47:07 - 00:09:12:10

Leigh

I am actually looking. I do use dating apps. I'm on Tinder on Bumble. But you have to pay dating apps to meet people. That is so wrong. Where you can go do some speed dating and you go in and you go talk to that person firsthand without doing it online. So I prefer speed dating it is much more productive.

00:09:12:15 - 00:09:14:20

Lauren

Do you have a game plan for speed dating?

00:09:15:00 - 00:09:24:22

Leigh

Have a nice conversation and you know you go from one conversation to the next and let it flow. A nice conversation with someone will be absolutely great.

00:09:25:02 - 00:09:28:06

Lauren

So what kind of things are you looking for in a partner?

00:09:28:08 - 00:09:52:02

Leigh

Someone who's outgoing, very spontaneous, very adventurous. Someone who can just. Yeah, wow me and doing awesome things. to become friends with first and then go with that after 2 to 3 years who knows talk about getting engaged then get married and have kids but yeah, things like that.

00:09:52:04 - 00:09:59:14

Lauren

Oh that's wonderful Leigh. So you potentially see marriage and children in your future. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

00:09:59:16 - 00:10:26:09

Leigh

I see getting married would be great for me and to become a husband to someone. To find my Beauty because I'm The Beast, and The Beast needs to find his Beauty and some day have kids. I love to become a father. I'm really good with my nieces and nephews. I'm 9 times an uncle and 1 time a great uncle. Her name is Elsie May and she's absolutely gorgeous.

00:10:26:14 - 00:10:38:02

Leigh

She brings tears to my eyes when I see her. I love my hugs with her and I love to spend more time with Elsie and spend time with all my family.

00:10:38:04 - 00:10:42:01

Lauren

What life lessons will you try to pass on to your children if you were to have them?

00:10:42:03 - 00:10:49:22

Leigh

I would teach you about my disability, I would teach them it's ok to be you, and I will teach them to love.

00:10:50:01 - 00:10:52:16

Lauren

Sounds like you would create beautiful little humans. Leigh.

00:10:52:22 - 00:10:53:09

Leigh

Yeah.

00:10:53:11 - 00:11:23:17

Raylene

Thanks for sharing your story with us. We'll now take a short break. Before returning to him over these life experiences.

Fiona

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00:11:23:19 - 00:11:32:23

Raylene

Welcome back, everyone. Leigh. You are a very independent person, but are there things in your life that you need support to do.

00:11:33:00 - 00:11:52:02

Leigh

I live on my own. I have been out for almost 11 years and it comes down to low vision. That's when I need support with night time stuff and then help with transport. I need help with my cooking. So all that type of stuff and I like going on holidays and I can't do holidays on my own.

00:11:52:08 - 00:12:00:15

Raylene

I know your powerlifting helps as a kind of release for you. What else helps support your mental health?

00:12:00:17 - 00:12:28:14

Leigh

I do have a mental health of depression anxiety. I also have a bit of OCD in me. I'm sort of a tidy and clean person. I don't like anything out of place, I have to make sure I have everything in my bag for my daily routine when I go out. I do look after my mental health. 1, when I go to powerlifting all that mental health comes out of me. Release The Beast, and I release all of my anger onto the weights.

00:12:28:16 - 00:12:56:10

Leigh

When I went to the Blue Mountains with my sister, I called Casey. I actually got dressed in drag. Wow. And put on makeup as well. And that was also a release for me as well. My mental health has gone away when I put makeup on and ladies clothes on, the anger went away. All these things that I'm doing is actually helps me with my losing weight, getting me back to the space that

00:12:56:13 - 00:12:58:03

Leigh

I'm supposed to be at.

00:12:58:05 - 00:13:02:16

Lauren

Leigh, can you tell us about how it makes you feel when you're just in drag and what you enjoy about it?

00:13:02:18 - 00:13:14:06

Leigh

It's like getting dressed up, getting on the stage, perform and feels that my mental health has gone just a little bit. Have you heard of Drag Syndrome in the in the States?

00:13:14:08 - 00:13:18:06

Lauren

Yes, I've seen videos of Drag Syndrome. They look amazing.

00:13:18:08 - 00:13:34:20

Leigh

So what I want to do is bring Drag Syndrome down under so that people with Down Syndrome can get dressed in drag and have fun with it and to perform on stage and just enjoy a whole lot of awesome stuff.

00:13:35:01 - 00:13:39:10

Lauren

And when you're in drag, do you like to dance or sing? What kind of performances do you do?

00:13:39:12 - 00:13:48:17

Leigh

I like cabaret, dancing, singing, you name it. It's a bit of everything like this. Flexing my muscles and stuff like that. Yeah. Definitely.

00:13:48:19 - 00:13:57:15

Raylene

You are involved in a number of environmental causes, that's why is caring for the environment important to you?

00:13:57:17 - 00:14:19:15

Leigh

Absolutely. People have a right to speak about the environment, people with disabilities they don't show it but they do feel it. I've been involved with the Wilderness Society 2 to 3 years ago now, and we would do a lot of stuff around looking after our beach life, looking after our land, looking after the animals.

00:14:19:17 - 00:14:24:02

Lauren

And you formed the group Green Earth Peers. Can you tell us a bit about that?

00:14:24:04 - 00:14:53:18

Leigh

Yes. So I formed a group Green Earth Peers. We talk about all different types of stuff. We talk about what's happening in their own lives around the environmental, climate change and stuff like that. And we also talk about the issues that people with disability are facing in the environmental sector. There's a lot of issues that needs to be addressed. We all need a voice and we all need to speak, especially around the climate and in the wilderness

00:14:53:18 - 00:14:54:20

Leigh

in this space.

00:14:54:22 - 00:15:01:03

Lauren

Was there something you experienced growing up that encouraged you to speak up and get involved with different issues?

00:15:01:05 - 00:15:31:24

Leigh

I've seen a lot of people with disability, not having a voice and not being heard. I was one of them. Everyone had control over my life, not just my parents, but my teachers. What I want to do out of that now is now that I'm a motivational public speaker and I'm speaking everywhere for different things or writing my first book and the stuff that I want to include in the future, like going to New York and speak at the United Nations would be the dream.

00:15:32:01 - 00:15:36:06

Leigh

Keep pushing it and keep pushing it and keep pushing it. Eventually they will listen to me.

00:15:36:10 - 00:15:41:16

Raylene

A lot of people with disabilities feel they don't have a voice or are not given a voice.

00:15:41:19 - 00:15:42:04

Leigh

Yes.

00:15:42:10 - 00:15:46:21

Raylene

Is it relevant for me to ask how it feels to have a voice?

00:15:46:23 - 00:15:57:10

Leigh

It is very relevant. I mean, having the voice feels that you're in control of everything you want to do in your life, and it feels great to help other people have a voice as well.

00:15:57:12 - 00:16:07:04

Lauren

Now, Lee, you have spoken to big crowds. Even as a young person, I think you were 13 when you started public speaking. Do you have any techniques that you use to make it easier for you?

00:16:07:10 - 00:16:46:22

Leigh

I've been public speaking for a very long time. I used to perform a lot in Elton John costume, the glasses, the glitter, you name it. I use that performance into speaking gigs and I remember speaking at big events, in Sydney. I was in front of 500 people once. I even cohosted with many with celebrities. Definitely. I dream to be on the world stage, going around the world, travelling, public speaking actually shows the importance of what people with Down Syndrome can do and my dad's in heaven saying, That's my boy, that's my son.

00:16:46:24 - 00:16:50:11

Leigh

What's next? And I'm still kicking goals one at a time.

00:16:50:13 - 00:16:55:12

Lauren

Well, what's next? You said you writing a book at the moment. What's it about?

00:16:55:14 - 00:17:14:16

Leigh

I write about my life living with Down Syndrome. Around segregation, adoption all that kind of stuff. All the advocacy work I've done over many years. Mental health as well in that book, Low expectations Discrimination. Basically, my whole life since I was born, now I'm 44. So definitely.

00:17:14:18 - 00:17:21:23

Raylene

What advice do you have for anybody who wants to work to improve society and the environment?

00:17:22:00 - 00:17:43:24

Leigh

Great question. My advice is be who you are and speak up about your passions, about your own passions, and then have your own journey. Be natural, be honest. Be clear about what you what you want to speak about and talk about from your own

experiences and not from other people's experience. Don't compare yourself to others.

00:17:44:01 - 00:17:46:20

Raylene

What does the future hold for you?

00:17:46:22 - 00:18:09:00

Leigh

My future is motivational public speaking, having my own business, travelling, writing more books. Lot of advocacy work. I sell myself round the world. They get in the Parliament House in Canberra will be another future goal. Competing as a Paralympian with my powerlifting. That's how I see myself in the future.

00:18:09:02 - 00:18:10:06

Raylene

Well done.

00:18:10:07 - 00:18:13:24

Lauren

And when you're not working, Leigh, where do you like to go on holidays?

00:18:14:01 - 00:18:32:09

Leigh

I've been to America and I've been to Hawaii. Been to New Zealand quite a few times, done skydiving and stuff like that. Thing I want to do in New Zealand is bungy jump. Take one adventure to the next. My dream holiday is to go to the Greek islands where Mamma Mia! was held in there.

00:18:32:11 - 00:18:34:09

Lauren

Oh Leigh, that sounds beautiful.

00:18:34:11 - 00:18:41:05

Raylene

If people are interested in learning more about you and your advocacy, where can they find you?

00:18:41:10 - 00:18:58:10

Leigh

My website is leighcreighton.com. That's my business website, leighcreighton.com. My Twitter is Leigh Creighton Motivational Speaker. My Facebook is Leigh Creighton My LinkedIn should be all under Leigh Creighton. Check it out. All those platforms.

00:18:58:12 - 00:19:00:06

Raylene



Penciling for sharing your story today.

00:19:00:07 - 00:19:06:03

Leigh

Thank you for giving me this time, this opportunity to speak. Just want to say thank you.

00:19:06:05 - 00:19:11:00

Lauren

And thank so, so much, Leigh, for sharing with us those things that were very emotional for you.

00:19:11:06 - 00:19:14:19

Leigh

It was hard to share, but it's good to share.

00:19:14:21 - 00:19:27:16

Raylene

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.

Fiona

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