

Interviewee Name: Jodee Mundy OAM

Interviewer Name: Erin Scudder

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Transcript

Erin: So yeah. Just to get started, could I invite you to introduce yourself however you would like to?

Jodee: I'm Jodee. I'm - I'm an artist and creative producer, I'm a manager, a festival director, an Auslan interpreter. I'm recently disabled myself - I live with a terminal cancer - but I'm doing well on treatment, I'm stable at the moment. And I'm also a CODA, so a child of Deaf adults. So, my whole family are Deaf except for myself. So Auslan is my first language. And I guess my journey in this practice has mostly been as a CODA and as an ally. However, since my recent diagnosis and the change in my body, and - I'm now - I guess having a new perspective of someone living with a chronic illness. So I suppose my own trajectory and journey, is, is deepening I suppose. The only way I can describe it, it's fu-, it's really funny!

Erin: Yeah, yeah it's - you've always been deeply involved in the world of, of deafness and disability. And now you have another - (inaudible).

Jodee: Yeah, I guess there's - there's sort of three elements that I've managed to pinpoint. The first one is as kin. So, this is different to ally. It's kin, you know, it's, it's as family.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And as, as, you know, cultural - custodians, say. It's like - yeah. So as kin, as ally, and yet also someone now living with disability. So, yeah. I guess I sort of see it through those lenses.

Erin: Yeah. How did you first become get interested in the arts or set out on your creative practice?

Jodee: I think growing up in the Deaf community - so I was immersed in the Deaf community. Everything we did was Deaf: Deaf Church, Deaf, Deaf clubs! Deaf games. Everywhere I went with my parents was obviously the Deaf world. So for me, I guess the formative experiences were, the Australian Theatre of the Deaf and going to the Deaf club every Friday night when we used to have big Deaf clubs before they got all closed down. People would get up and tell stories and there was improvisation nights and I used to jump up as a kid on the stage, there was a big stage and we'd all, all the Deaf kids and the CODAs would play on the stage and, I think, yeah, just growing up - sort of, we were doing a lot of mime and charades and storytelling and I guess back at that time there weren't really captions or access to sort of popular culture for my family and community. So, we kind of create, we created it ourselves - but it was very marginalised, you know, no one ever knew about it. It wasn't funded or resourced or part of the cultural economy as the way other mainstream arts would be perceived - it wasn't valued in that way, but it certainly had a huge impact on me growing up. Yeah, so there's that. And then I guess seeing local performances at the local shopping centre.

Erin: Yeah?

Jodee: Like, liter- - I lit-, I grew up in a very sheltered world, you know, very disconnected from the mainstream. So, yeah, performances at the shopping centre at the Westfield and, you know, watching Rage, you know.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: John - Young Talent Time - these were big influences for me because television was my kind of link to the world. But luckily I was a smart kid - I managed to work my way into landing myself a position at the Newtown High School of the Performing Arts, which is a very trendy inner city school in Sydney. I don't know how I got there, but I managed to find my way and I found my tribe. I found, you know, a inner city performing arts school, where I was really able to, be - where my talent was, was

able to be held in a, in a bit more of a mainstream context where I could actually have teachers and training. Yeah.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Yep.

Erin: And then go-, moving forward from that point, what were some of the standout experiences or people that influenced you or helped to shape you - your - into the creative practitioner you are today?

Jodee: Definitely some high school teachers, but I guess, I - key people probably would be when I was at VCA. Richard Murphett in the animateering course. When I left, I wanted to do something with my community, so at that time, I identified that there was no kind of network or anything for Deaf artists, and I was 20 years old, so I - I don't know how - ah, I was in - that's right, I was doing interpreting. I was doing some interpreting in theatre shows and we were experimenting, looking at, how do we integrate an interpreter into the show?

Erin: Oh yeah.

Jodee: And we did a show called Happy 1000 ... 1000 Bahagia at the Melbourne Fringe, and we won the Innovation of Form Award. And that show was in Auslan, English, and Bahasa Indonesian.

Erin: Oh, wow.

Jodee: And yeah, we won an award, and I remember being 20 at the time and a lot of Deaf people came to that show and that was the first time I really experimented with mixing Auslan in a contemporary performance with two other languages and it was an amazing show. We ended up doing it in London. But that was really influential on me. I'd worked with the director, Sandra Fiona Long and a couple of artists from Indonesia. And then also I had a mentor, Bernie M Jansen, who's a writer, and she helped - I, I, I met her also through interpreting - yeah that's basically how I started meeting people, was, yeah, working as an interpreter with other theatre makers. And they'd approached me

and said, “hey, can you work with us to make our show accessible?” And I, I was very interested in, well how do I - how do we make this not just me on the side of the stage, but how do we make the world of the play more interesting? So, these sort of key collaborations opened me up to meeting new artists.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So Bernie M Jansen, she - I worked with her, this was for the Melbourne Writers Festival in 2020 - and we did a show, I can't remember the name, but, because of her, I told her that the Deaf community just had no - even at Arts Access Victoria, there wasn't really any connection to the Deaf community at that time.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And I knew a lot of young Deaf people who wanted to participate, but there was nothing back then, Erin -nothing. Nothing. And so Bernie M Jansen assisted me in writing a funding application - I think that was to, like, the Ian Potter Foundation - or something, back then. I've got the archives, they're all at Arts Access Victoria now. But that basically set up the foundation of Deaf Arts Network.

Erin: Ah okay.

Jodee: So Deaf Arts Network was founded by myself, Andrew Wiltshire, who's Deaf, Asphyxia, who's Deaf, Lynn Gordon, who's an interpreter, Selwyn Hoffman who's a Deaf artist, Abby Twiss, who's also a Deaf artist. We came together as a group to say, how can we create a network? And so we got our first grant. It was like \$20,000. But it was a lot back then, and we started Deaf Arts Network at the North Richmond Community Health Centre. And we did a pilot project through email -.

Erin: Yeah!

Jodee: - just before we had websites. Oh my God, I can't believe we did this through email. We emailed people around Victoria trying to find other Deaf people -

Erin: Right.

Jodee: - through artists, through email, and then we looked at trying to set up some workshops and we've got photos. All these archives are at Deaf Art - ah, at Arts Access Victoria - it's called the Deaf Arts Network Box, if you can find it. But all - there's pictures and everything, years of work. But that ended up, we ended up getting more funding, and then I was like, this needs to be led by a Deaf person -

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: - because the group appointed me to run it -

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: - because I kind of had the most sort of experience, but I'd only just come out of VCA, so I really was new.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So I said that we need to find a new home. So that's when, I think it was Nicole Beyer was the CEO of Arts Access Victoria or someone else - I can't remember, but we moved Net - Deaf Arts Network into the Arts Access Victoria Office.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And then I ran it for a year and we did all these sort of workshops with Deaf artists and then a year later, Ross Onley-Zerkel, um, got the position and he became the first Deaf coordinator of Deaf Arts Network. And then that ran for I think like 15, 16 years. And then another one popped up in New South Wales and I think there was one in Queensland. But yeah, that's a whole another project, Deaf Arts Network, there's a whole history that Ross Onley-Zerkel would be a great person to speak to.

Erin: Oh yep. I might get you - ask you if you could email me.

Jodee: Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure.

Erin: Also, as part of this project, we are gathering organisational archives, so I've just put down Deaf Arts Network, so I'll follow up with you on that as well.

Jodee: Yeah. I also know that Arts Access Victoria hold all of the old Australian Theatre of the Deaf archives.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: They're housed there. I know that when it closed down in, like, 1997, Veronica Pardo requested that AAV hold custodianship of those archives. And I also know who you could speak to there as well: Andrew Wiltshire. He's one of the past board members.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: And Caroline Bowditch. Or, not Caroline Bowditch, Caroline -

Erin: She is on my list, but she's a very hard lady to book in.

Jodee: Caroline Bowditch? Yeah, God, I bet. Caroline - what's her last name? Signing her name.

Erin: We can follow up by email.

Jodee: She used to be the artistic director of Australian Theatre of the Deaf. And she's Deaf herself.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: Caroline - I can't, I've forgotten her last name. Anyway, Covid brain. Yeah.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: So basically Australian Theatre of the Deaf ran for like 25 years from the 70s until early 90s, but, it, it, it the funding got cut and nothing has ever established since. We've never had a national theatre for the Deaf since.

Erin: Oh, really?

Jodee: Yep.

Erin: I was going to ask you, because it sounds like you've been so instrumental in, you know, implementing these funded programs, which, you know, when you were growing up having the Deaf clubs and the Deaf community and then bringing that into a funded space.

Jodee: Mmmm.

Erin: Is that continuing and growing or has it been -

Jodee: No, No. Well, no, sadly. Deaf Arts Network -

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: - closed down when Veronica left. I don't know if there's any connection, but Veronica's fluent in Auslan.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: So when Caroline began, it - it - nothing's happened since. So.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Yeah, the Deaf artists are - sort of don't have a organisation to support them at the moment.

Erin: Right.

Jodee: It's basically sort of independent - indie led now.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But there's very little support. And I still am the mentor and support. I c- - I probably coach and keep supporting maybe about 15 Deaf artists.

Erin: Wow.

Jodee: Yeah. All voluntary?

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Yeah. I know Flow Festival - I don't know if you've spoken with them -

Erin: It's on my list.

Jodee: Good. They recently got a \$200,000 grant through Creative Victoria. I'm - I wrote that application, so there's still a lot of - it's like things get set up, and then -

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: - and, and, it really needs people who can sign, you know. I think when it sits in AAV and there's no one at the organisation who signs, it's very hard to maintain that kind of connection. Yeah. And, there are Deaf artists who are wanting to - who are independently leading, but you can only do things for so long by yourself.

Erin: Yes. Yeah. So this might be a good time to ask you, or to ask you to expound on, in your journey and your experience what some of the major barriers or obstacles have been. To your own practice and also to setting up these sorts of communities.

Jodee: Barriers to my own practice. That's a big question. Which one? Barriers to what - you said two?

Erin: As in, barriers or obstacles as a sort of counterpoint to the, the idea of, you know, experiences and people that have motivated you and opened up doors and opened up possibilities. You know, has it all been smooth sailing or have there also been obstacles or significant barriers that came up that both -

Jodee: Yeah.

Erin: - I mean, maybe made it harder for you to practice, but also made it harder for the Deaf community to come together and develop art as, as an artistic group.

Jodee: It's tricky because I've been doing this for 25 years, so I don't know which part to talk about.

Erin: Yeah, it's a lot!

Jodee: Every project - yeah, it's like, oh my God, I don't even know where to -

Erin: Yeah,

Jodee: You know, I'm almost like, per project, I could pick everything apart.

Erin: Yeah, there's so many details.

Jodee: I guess, I guess - okay, so if I just take a big step back and take a big picture lens.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: So. I guess what I, what I can talk about that helped me - and then maybe I'll talk about - do you want me to talk about the barriers or talk about how, how it was helped? Sorry, I'm a bit unclear.

Erin: I'm interested - I mean, the most important thing is for you to talk about whatever you'd like to. Whatever you think is, you know, you'd really want to have included in this

archive for people to understand about the history. I know that's probably making it even broader.

Jodee: All right. Let me, let me try and work it out then. So I guess - okay. This - the major barrier that still exists today, that has not changed since I, I've been around - and, and you know, from my point of view - is that we still haven't seen Deaf artists lead their own show or art and put it in a mainstream place.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: Never. Never in this country. The, the kind of - where you see Deaf artists - they kind of might get to Melbourne Fringe -.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: - that's it. My work has managed to get to places like Sydney Festival, the Barbican, Darwin Festival, you know, it's been successful. But I believe that's because, well, partly, you know, the artists who, even - if they're Deaf-blind or, or Deaf or, are not with a disability who are working on it are all very talented people, but - the fact that I can hear has given me a privilege and access in a way that my peers haven't. Even though we're all from the same community.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And that's a problem.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: And when I make my work, I don't only do it for myself, I do it for others. I always want to ensure that my work can open doors for other people, but I'm not seeing them coming through, Erin. I'm not.

Erin: Like the Deaf artists, you mean?

Jodee: Yeah, it's, they kind of get to one level they present and then they don't tour. They don't - I don't see kind of pathways.

Erin: Yeah, why do you think that is?

Jodee: I think there's a lack of kind of - obviously we don't have a cultural policy - but there's no sense of sort of strategic partnerships. I mean, even from, even for non-disabled artists, there's no sort of strategic alignment where artists can sort of tour from place to place. Like, say, in Europe - apparently it's very well coordinated, whereas in Australia it's not. But there needs to be investment in major festivals, and major presenting houses need to invest in these kind of initiatives, you know, like Alter State for example, where they create time and space for artists who are Deaf or disabled to be on their stages.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And - yeah, I see it over and over again. I see a great work by, you know, a Deaf artist who's worked really hard to get there, with the very little resources and access that they have, and I just see it once, and then I don't see it tour again.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: I mean, I se- you know, there's maybe one or two. But -

Erin: Yeah, what -

Jodee: - there's this sort of cycle of cultural production in the Deaf community. It creates very, you know, we set up these networks and frameworks and programs and we say on these things, if you're Deaf or disabled and please apply. And then they come in, they make the work, but then nothing happens after that. And that's the major thing that I see.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: Yeah. So that's something that I really, want to point out. You know, I started when I was 20, and now I'm 45, and it's still the same.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Not good enough.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: You know, the millions and millions and millions of dollars and all of the staff and all of the organisations. It is not good enough. And it comes down to putting people in roles who sign.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So - you can see where the successes are, like Veronica when she was CEO. Look at the Deaf Arts Network history, it's very successful.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: She - the CEO signed.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So I think investment in - like I know Melbourne Fringe have had Anna Seymour, she is a Deaf dancer and she was in - a producer for one year at Melbourne Fringe and the whole Deaf community were on fire, you know. 'Oh my God, we've got a Deaf associate producer.'

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Like, those kind of things signal so much to community.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Anyway, that's my sort of thoughts as, as a kin and as an ally.

Erin: Yeah,

Jodee: I suppose, in my own practice, the kind of barriers I've, I experience now - well, I'm now a festival director, in a very busy context, living with stage four cancer, which is pretty crazy, I have to admit. So I'm looking at how to transition myself out of my role for my own health, which is a really massive thing to deal - like, come to terms with.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Having to - you know, my doctors are saying I need to leave my job because of my health, because, you know, my condition will deteriorate. But what I'm doing is I'm trying to transition out, but I'm looking around and I'm trying to find where else I can go and I can't find where else I can go.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So I keep, I keep making myself keep up. Which I guess is very sort of able, ableist. So I'm still running on this treadmill, knowing that I shouldn't. But I don't want to be unemployed.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So, yeah, it leaves me the choice to - I'm now working four days a week.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Which means I'm getting paid less.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But if I drop down to three days a week, I'm paid even more (less).

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But I'm doing the same job, at my best. So, it's really shit, you know, like you do your best at your best capacity - and I know that I can do four days and that's someone else's five days.

Erin: Yes.

Jodee: But yeah, I'm only paid four days. So, so there's that kind of barrier with my own health.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Another barrier is, is I look out - in the landscape - and all the jobs are full-time.

Erin: Yes.

Jodee: And, again, it's that thing of, well, if I did four days, can I still be paid five days?

Erin: Yeah,

Jodee: But, you know, trying to negotiate that in the Arts - you could do that in other industries, but in the Arts, they're very, you know, 'no, no.' The cheaper we can have you, the better. Like the - the pay is really low anyway. Do you know what I mean?

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So I would say yeah, definitely - and, and like that pay / work / life balance. Also, I've got some shows touring next year and I'm going back to the UK. I'm taking my show 'Personal' to the Barbican.

Erin: I was going to ask what you're currently working on -

Jodee: Yeah!

Erin: - creatively.

Jodee: Yeah. And then I've got a tour lined up in Sydney and I think Brisbane.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But my - because the set I used to have was before I became sick, um, is too heavy for me. So we're redesigning it so it's really light. Otherwise, I get very breathless.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So, even the way I'm touring, we've had to make sure that it's not so full - that you know, it's, you know, doing maybe two shows a week - on my health.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Which, you know, is an interesting learning. Because, it's not as appealing to presenters, you know, because it costs more. So yeah, even as a performer, you know, usually with touring you can do, 'I'll do six shows a week and I'll, you know, do two a day' and now it's like, 'uh-uh, I have to do one every two days because of my health.'

Erin: Mm hmm.

Jodee: And you have to sort of factor that into the costings and that can make it more expensive for presenters. So I guess sort of, it would be pretty cool to have some support around that, some sort of investment around supporting artists with disabilities, with some business incentives or subsidies.

Erin: Yeah, yeah. And what you're saying is really interesting in terms of accessibility requirements that people don't tend to think of, like for example, measuring, you know, the full time - the, the value of work based on output rather than days or hours spent -

Jodee: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

Erin: - on, you know. Or like thinking about an accessibility requirement as, as spacing, you know, time to rest.

Jodee: Yeah. Yeah.

Erin: Because there's certain things people have, but those are really good points about the elements of accessibility that aren't on the radar.

Jodee: Well because I live with, I live with - I've got a lung cancer - like it's, it's clear, it's stable. But the scar tissue of the tumours has meant I get quite breathless and I have Covid at the moment so it's a bit more obvious. But yeah, I can't run, I can't push myself. Otherwise I get very breathless and only half, half of my lung capacity is working. So I get more tired more easily. But I can still go like a gun, you know? But I just maybe do it in less time, in a day.

Erin: Yes.

Jodee: So, yeah, those sorts of things. Yeah. I think, other things in terms of, you know, I am in a leadership role. Like I'm a festival lead, festival director and I'm looking around to sort of go, well, how can I transition out of my role but still mean, still sustain myself in some kind of leadership role. But you know, it's not like there's jobs being advertised for disabled arts leaders anywhere. And you know, I look around and I see these other jobs and I think, are they really - and it says, you know, people with disabilities are strongly encouraged to apply. Well, I've applied and I haven't even been shortlisted for some jobs that I'm quite surprised that I - you know - as a festival director and at my level, I didn't even get an interview. So there are certain - oh, but other places I did get interviews, but - I guess it's just that thing of like, how do you, as a disabled - someone who has gotten to my level - be able to find those sort of pathways and, keep growing, but in a way is, doesn't mean I'm working harder. And, like, leadership - it's working smarter, not, not harder. And that's really tricky in the Arts because it's very under-resourced.

Erin: Mm hmm.

Jodee: And the culture is very much about 'work, push, push, push.' And -

Erin: Yeah. 'Pull yourself up by your bootstraps,' which is very ableist.

Jodee: - yeah, and, and running on very little, you know, the smell of an oily rag. And, you know, these are the sort of things where it's like, God - how do you create a culture of care and well-being, in these contexts? So, you know, I've been reflecting a lot and thinking about looking at maybe transitioning even out of the Arts since my, since I've acquired my disability.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Like, I'd still want to create. I still want to have a practice.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But maybe not work in an organisation. I don't know if there's a place for me, but I do keep trying to tell myself: it's up to us, it's up to Deaf and disabled artists to forge our own careers and our own pathways and create the worlds that we want to see.

Erin: Mmm hmm.

Jodee: But it really depends on our allies and our organisations to open those doors to us. But it's really hard for me to believe when I still don't see even my Deaf peers be able to put on a show at The Art Centre or anywhere, anywhere, like in 25 years. And I'm 45. I don't want to wait around another 25 years for nothing to happen.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Sorry, it sounds very morbid.

Erin: No, it's really important to get this. I think one of the great things about the archive is to capture these things people are thinking about and observing so that we can have a record of it and a sort of like: look, all of these people are pointing out that maybe this is what needs to happen and maybe this is what hasn't happened, and - yeah, my hope is that it might have the potential to be a, a force. You know? We can hope.

Jodee: Yep.

Erin: In terms of - this is a very archive-driven question.

Jodee: (Laughing).

Erin: What do you think are the key milestones or big, major happenings in the history of Disability Arts - so big picture - in the history of Disability Arts in Australia over the last 50 years?

Jodee: 50?

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: Yeah. Okay. Well, the Australian Theatre of the Deaf.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: You can find the dates. I don't know, I can't remember what they are, but 70s to the 90s.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: Ba - it's called Baba Theatre - B- A- B- A- Theatre of the Deaf.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: That was running for two years. That was from 1998 to 2000.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: That was the first show I ever directed. It was with 15 Deaf people. And, it was a little Deaf theatre company that we ran for two years - or three, three years - but Craig Miller, who is a Deaf actor -

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: - very inspired, inspired the Melbourne Deaf community - he was killed in a car accident and the whole company shut down.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So that was something. We toured - we did one show at Collingwood TAFE and then we toured the show to Horsham. And that was it. But it was a big thing for our community. You know, it was 15 Deaf people on a stage.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And then in 2001, myself, Andrew Wiltshire, Asphyxia. Lynn Borden, Selwyn Hoffman, Abbie Twiss - set up Deaf Arts Network in partnership with North Richmond Community Health Centre and with Vic Deaf, where we did our pilot project, under the mentorship of Bernie M Jansen, and I was the first coordinator of Deaf Arts Network until 2000 and - end of 2001. And then we housed it to Arts Access Victoria. And that created - and then I recruited Ross Onley-Zerkel, who became the first Deaf Arts officer, who ran it for like 15 years. So that was a pretty pivotal time. I would say all of the archives of Ross and the work he did has, you know, Deaf hip hop dancers, it has, a whole range of different shows.

Erin Yeah.

Jodee: I then went overseas and then kind of worked overseas, so I'll just think about when I came - oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. The year 2000 - this show, 'Happy 1000, 1000 Bahagia' - which I can send photos to you if you need - that won a Melbourne Fringe award. That was probably the first - okay - the first theatre show that had an integrated interpreter -

Erin: Okay.

Jodee: - that won an award.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So that was in the year 2000. That was a pretty pivotal moment because there hadn't been one like that before. 2000 ... I would say the Deaf Can Dance group, that was in the year 2004, under Deaf Arts Network. What was after that? Oh... 'Butterfly Hands'. That's a project that was at Fed Square. Have you heard of that one?

Erin: Yeah, that rings a bell, yeah,

Jodee: Yeah? So I worked - I kind of was the in-between person that linked up Fed Square and the Deaf community, so - I was kind of behind the scenes, and I wrote the English translation of the poem. Yeah. And worked with a whole group of people there. So 'Butterfly Hands' – 'Strange Fruits' - we had a collaboration: two Deaf art- myself, Anna Seymour, and Jo Dunbar, and I - worked on a Strange Fruit show. Do you have archives of that?

Erin: No, I don't. I don't think so. But I'll check with the team.

Jodee: Yeah.

Erin: I know that Jo Dunbar is on our list.

Jodee: Yeah, that was, on a - that was in like 2010, I think.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: That was a pretty amazing experience. What else? I'm just thinking way back before I start thinking about my own practice. Oh, Polyglot Theatre. We did a workshop - a six month residency at the Furlong Park School for the Deaf, and we, yeah, created a whole show with the Deaf kids. And then from there I worked with Polyglot doing the first - no doing an Auslan version of the Muck Heap show, which is sort of Polyglot's show that went for ten years and that toured around Victoria.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And that was probably one of the few sort of touring shows in Auslan at that time. If any. There weren't really any! Ah - actually in Moomba Parade. You know what?

I'm going to just bring up my CV because it has all of the things that I worked on, it will prompt me to remember.

Erin: Maybe if you can send it through to me, that would be great too. And then I can follow up with maybe -

Jodee: The thing is, it's all written in my CV and it's kind of cryptic, but when I read it - I can type something up for you.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So I can break it down for you. It's just I can see the project, so it helps me remember.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Doo doo doo. Yeah, in 2008, there was a Deaf float in the Moomba parade. It was a group of Deaf dancers. And that was led by, Loz Serrono and her, her hearing sister, Demi Serrono. So there was a whole group signing in Auslan and dancing and that was pretty cool.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Okay. In terms of my own work from 2012, to 2022, I've been working on "Imagine Touch" with Deaf blind artists.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: So from 2012 to 2018 was the live show and the installation. And there's a research report - I don't know if you've seen it? The 'Inclusion is a Myth' research report? It's an academic report.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: I'll send it to you.

Erin: Oh, that sounds great. Thanks.

Jodee: Yeah. Yeah, you can - it's been published by a doctor of research, so you can use it for your academic stuff, too. That show started out in a crypt - in the Saint Paul's Cathedral crypt and evolved into a show at the Arts House, which then toured to Sydney Festival, which we then took to the Barbican Centre in London. And then only at The (last) Other Film Festival we premiered the documentary. So - did you see it by any chance?

Erin: I didn't get to! I booked it -

Jodee: Oh damn. That's okay -

Erin: - and then had to work.

Jodee: Okay, that's fine. I can send it to you.

Erin: I really want to see it. It was my highlight -

Jodee: I can send it to you.

Erin: I would love to watch it.

Jodee: Because that will show you the five years of work.

Erin: Wow, I didn't realise there was so much work gone into it.

Jodee: Yeah, it's ten years. So the documentary followed pretty much six years to make the show and how we did it.

Erin: Amazing.

Jodee: So for me, they're pretty pivotal - like, 2017 – “Imagine Touch” presented 2018, toured Sydney Festival. End of 2018, it went to the UK. Then 2022, the documentary

launched as part of The Other Film Festival at ACMI. Another show that I made is called “The Carer's Project - a Sanctuary in the City”, and that was commissioned by the City of Melbourne in 2015. And that was a work created with 20 carers: primary carers and members of their families who had disabilities.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: And that was a one year project. And basically it was a sanctuary for carers and their families, and for anyone who needed a space to just go in and reflect on how to take time out. And that was really beautiful project and that happened in the city of Melbourne. And then I made a show called “Personal” about being a CODA. Which presented at Arts House in 2018, toured to the Sydney Opera House, and did a Victorian tour and Darwin Festival tour in 2018. Yeah. And that got nominated for a lot of awards as well. So did – “Imagine Touch” got an award. Green Room Award. And then - what was I going to say. And then 2019, I got sick. 2020 I was awarded an Order of Australia medal. And then, I kind of haven't really done anything except work for Fuse - the festival that lead - and in the Fuse Festival, I've been working with the Flow Festival. I've been working with Jess Kapuscinski-Evans and Sarah Holbert and the Amplified Elephants - a whole another group of artists.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Through - as a, as a programmer, working with them as a programmer. And I'm mentoring a few people as well. And kind of yeah, doing my voluntary mentoring. I continue to do that.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Yeah. And now, looking at how to exit my job and find another role. But I've just been accepted into the Sink Leadership program.

Erin: Oh, yeah, I saw that.

Jodee: Which I'm excited about. So I can, I guess, have those conversations about how do you navigate this landscape? Being disabled? Without having an ally.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: We have allies. But yeah, I've got to work out who are my allies, I suppose.

Erin: Mmmm. What have you observed over the years? What do you think the - I don't really want to say mainstream - non-disabled public's engagement with Deaf and disabled Arts has been - the level of awareness and engagement. You know, has it - is it there, has it evolved? What do you think?

Jodee: Yeah, it's definitely evolved. I think - like if, when I think about it, when I was a little girl, the first thing that was on television that was captioned was "Home and Away".

Erin: (Laughing).

Jodee: And "Neighbours", "Neighbours". This - before the news.

Erin: Yeah, right!

Jodee: So. And you look at the world now, you know, the content is incredible in terms of captioning. So I think a lot of non-disabled content is more accessible. Obviously that's evolved massively on, on our screens and in the, on the Internet. For sighted people mainly. I wouldn't say that about other people with other disabilities. But in terms of our own creative economy and the Deaf and disabled, creative and cultural economies, I think there's been recognition that there's untapped investment and untapped talent. And I'm starting to see more investment and more money being put into these areas of production. I'm not seeing that kind of investment, though, happening in our institutions, our education institutions. So while we might see programs like the Arts House residency for disabled artists, or we might see Alter State, what we're not seeing is investment in our courses. Our training. So how do you expect an artist who hasn't even had proper formal training, for example, to suddenly take a huge leap to somewhere like The Art Centre, where they may have only had a chance to practice on a fringe stage. And - and to me - I, I still don't see enough of that happening on our main stages, for example. On our screens, I'm seeing it a bit more.

You know, like, I'm seeing films like "A Quiet Place", "CODA" - you see like, you know, a whole deaf cast, except there wasn't any CODA, so don't talk to me about that.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Like, oh, my God, it's like making a film called "Deaf!" with no Deaf people in it, or "Queer!" with no queer people in it. You don't call a film "CODA" and have no fucking CODA in it.

Erin: Yeah, yeah.

Jodee: It's weird, it's really weird.

Erin: It is weird.

Jodee: Anyway, that's a whole 'nother thing.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So, yeah, on our screens, I'm seeing it, you know, like "Game of Thrones", you know, you can see it.

Erin: Yeah,

Jodee: But, like - the Commonwealth - oh sorry, was it the Commonwealth Games in the UK? That was amazing. Like the Paralympics opening ceremony. Like all - I think the UK are paving the way in terms of that kind of incredible engagement.

Erin: Yep, yep.

Jodee: I mean, I lived there for seven years and - in London and - was part of that wave - more as an interpreter, as a young interpreter, just working with all these amazing people. But, you know, I see places like Unlimited in the UK and think, oh my God, where's our one? We need one like that.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: You know, and I would love to be one of those people leading that, you know, like, give me a job like that.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But, you know, I'm in this council running a festival, barely able to keep up, you know, and trying to create frameworks - that sort of piecemeal - without any sort of national strategy or cohesive investment from local, state and government - national investment.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Anyway, I'm off point now, I think I've lost, lost the question.

Erin: No, you're not. You've gone into the next question. One of the I'm just sort of picking and choosing from a whole sheet of questions. It's a yes, no question, but it also has some follow ups. Is your art political?

Jodee: Oh, very much so, yeah.

Erin: And then you've already been speaking to this a bit, but, you know, in what ways do you think of your art as being political?

Jodee: Oh I, I want to put stories on the stage and on screens that have not been told. That exist but are not seen. So yeah, the Deaf-blind story. The Deaf Perspective. And I did those both as kin, as ally, and as someone from the comm - a hearing member of the community.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Who had the privilege and access to know how to make those things happen.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And I knew that if I didn't do it, I certainly couldn't see anyone else doing it. So I just did it.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And there's been offshoots, but nothing ever since has just formulated and stayed strong.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Yep. Because it never felt my place to - because I'm not Deaf, it's not my place to set up a Deaf theatre company. Does that make sense? I can set up a project -

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: - but really, it needs to be led by Deaf people. But I'm always in the background kind of going, 'if you need a hand, let me know!'

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And then things get set up and then they sort of fall again because we don't have those other people in the industry who sign or Deaf leaders are not getting the jobs that we need to - you know? - the pathways aren't there.

Erin: Yep.

Jodee: There was another thing I was going to say, but I forgot the question.

Erin: Politics.

Jodee: Oh, yeah. Politics. Oh yeah, who's not being seen. Who's not being seen. So the Deaf blind community - and, you know, that's a ten year project, with the research project, the documentary, the show, the installation - I wanted to do that because I knew that it's really, really, really, really, really demanding to make a show with Deaf blind

people in terms of the resources, the expertise. It's not something that can happen really easily. So that's why I made sure I gave it as many perspectives as possible so it could live on as an example for others. That's why it took ten years.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: "Personal" is also another work that sort of examines the personal and the political. The perspective of, you know, a Deaf family in Australia from a hearing perspective. And yet wanting to get that story out there because it wasn't really out there. There's not really any Deaf family out there in Australia that people think about. You know, there's "CODA" the film, but that's all created by hearing people with no CODA in it. Again, I'm just saying! "The Carers Project", that was an initiative set by the City of Melbourne. They, they wanted to make a project with carers, but as someone who grew up - I don't identify as a carer but as sort of a family interpreter - I did connect very closely with those people. So that was just a work about shedding light on care, and what it means to be kin and ally in those spaces. And then I guess the next work - The Deaf Arts Network was something that was also political. It was an intervention into space and into programming. All of the interpreted interventions into shows. I don't interpret anymore, but back then, I guess they were sort of a way of increasing - of reminding audiences there were Deaf people in the world and we should get them in.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Yeah I guess they're my sort of main interventions. It doesn't feel like much when I say it, but, you know, that's 25 years.

Erin: Oh, it's a big, BIG amount.

Jodee: And, and I haven't stopped, you know, like - I guess Fuse, the festival I lead now is also an intervention. You know, as someone who can lead the festival, I'm - I have the capacity and resources to create frameworks for Deaf and disabled people. But because we're a new festival and we've been in pandemic, we're still at very early stages, but I've been focusing on empowering the team, you know, working on the team and working on key projects. But no major initiative yet because the team are still in recovery.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And then I guess now, with my own health, for me, it's political. You know, like I do want to fight. I do want to stay in the Arts and I do want to be paid well. I do want to look after my health, and I believe I have a lot to give. I just, I need to forge a pathway, and I'm literally, I'm looking where - where can I go next to keep making a difference?

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But it really requires places to open their doors.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Yeah.

Erin: Absolutely. I think we've covered almost everything - I just noticed we've also gone over time -

Jodee: Really?

Erin: - but I just wanted to wrap up by asking, you know, do you think there's anything else you'd like to add or anything that I should have asked you that I haven't?

Jodee: I think that NDIS is a big thing, too, in the context of all of this.

Erin: Oh yeah - yep.

Jodee: And Julia Gillard was pretty instrumental.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: And her as a female leader, you know - I think that's just a really pivotal thing to remember. I think the pandemic has really shifted things. Like a lot of interpreters are wary of going to work on location now and would prefer to work from home.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So it's starting to mean that a lot of Deaf people are accessing interpreters remotely.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: Which can be really challenging. If you're a dancer and you're Deaf and you want to find an interpreter and you can't find one, but you can only find one on a laptop. But they're not in the room. And you're in a dance class.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: So there's a lot of challenges around the hybrid model. Anyway, I'm sure Deaf people will talk to you about that, but that's something that I've noted that is another layer of complexity.

Erin: It's another layer, like on the one hand, you know, everyone is quick to say that during the pandemic -

Jodee: Yeah.

Erin: - things are more accessible, but actually it's more complicated. Like a lot of -
(inaudible)

Jodee: We didn't imagine that the interpreters would just want to stay home.

Erin: Yeah, yeah.

Jodee: Yeah. Because then they don't have to travel.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: You can do more jobs online.

Erin: Yeah.

Jodee: But then, you know, when you're in a hospital and you need an interpreter, you're only speaking to someone through a computer, it's -

Erin: Yeah, yeah.

Jodee: Anyway, so there's a lot about the future of access in the hybrid model that I think is something that's - I think a lot of the findings and the history and what's really important will really need to shape how we move forward as well.

Erin: Yep, yep. Well, thanks, Jodee. That's been an amazing interview.

Jodee: (Laughing).