Interviewee: Kate Larsen
Interviewer: Jung Yoon
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Transcript

Kate: I'm Kate Larsen. I'm a freelance arts cultural and nonprofit consultant and writer, and I'm based here in Tarndanya, Adelaide and Kaurna Yerta. Yet I'm a lapsed Western Australian. I grew up in regional WA in Kinjarling Albany and have spent my entire adult career working in the arts and cultural sector. I've worked in every state and territory of Australia, in the UK and into Asia, mostly within the small to medium sector, which is where my heart lies. Small to medium sized organisations that support independent artists working across all different art forms.

Jung: So is there anyone who influenced you become who you were, or how did you decided to become artists like a writer and the consultancy?

Kate: I was encouraged by my parents and family to be involved in the arts from a very early age, and then as I went, moved to the city to go to university, started getting involved more in the arts management side of things, and from there went on to run organisations and now I help other organisations run themselves.

Jung: So it was more a family sort of influence?

Kate: Yeah, originally, yes.

Jung: Oh, that's interesting. So how did you get involved in Disability Arts?

Kate: I moved to London in the early 2000s and although I had always had a kind of family and personal connection to disability and I had worked in the arts sector, it wasn't until I applied for a job at Shape Arts, which is the kind of national, the UK's national peak organisation for Arts and Disability based out of London, that those two sides of my work and personal life really came together. I remember where I was sitting when I first read about that job opportunity and first, which was also the first time I read about the social model of disability. I almost remember what I was wearing that day because it was so profound for me to finally have the language to talk about being a non=disabled disability ally and how I could work in that space without taking up space that I obviously wanted to create for disabled adults and disabled leaders. So I went to work for SHAPE for several years, which was a disability led organisation under the CEO, quite famous disability artist Tony Heaton, and an extraordinary team of disabled artists and staff and non-disabled allies.

Kate: And that was a really incredible kind of dive in the deep end introduction to both arts and disability and disability arts. The two ends of that spectrum that we're talking about and I loved it, absolutely loved it. But and then I moved back to Australia and got the job as CEO of Arts Access Australia nationally there are very similar roles. I was second in charge, one of the team of second in charge in London, and I took on the CEO role in Australia for a period of fixed term but it wasn't until I came to Australia that I became politicised and became a really proactive and fierce ally around arts and disability, because the differences in the disability rights and disability access between the UK and Australia, even though they're quite similar countries, the differences were so huge. I moved back to Australia just before the NDIS and that's what really seeing that gap, seeing how far Australia was and still is behind in many senses. That's what really made me politicised around that arts and disability space.

Jung: So how long did you work in the arts? Access Arts Australia.

Kate: So I, I had so I was called about the job at Access Australia on the day that I returned, that I flew into the country on my return from living in England for five years. At that stage. It was a was a short contract because of a turnover, leadership turnover. Access Australia at that stage was a well-established organisation I think was already over 15 years old, maybe more at that point, but it never been disabled. Lead that always has non-disabled CEOs. So I landed back in the country, I went for an interview, I got the job, but I also resigned from the job on the day that I accepted the contract on the basis and this is an example of mean becoming politicised almost as immediately as I hit the ground, because in Australia it's still more common for arts and disability and disability organisations to be run by non-disabled people and there's absolutely no reason for that and we have extraordinary, experienced, talented disabled leaders in all fields but there's still this hangover from that old school paternalistic, let's do something charity model, let's do something that's helped the poor disabled people and those disabled leaders aren't stepping out of the way and giving up their jobs so that disabled leaders to take it on.

Kate: But I'd come up in London through a model where you wouldn't dream of having a non-disabled leader at the head of a disability organisation. So that was that was what I did on the first day of the job, is that I resigned on the day that I started and I said I would undertake to replace myself with a disabled person within two years. We also had a lot of other long list of things that we needed to get done. We got all of that list ticked off and recruited and replace myself with the first the Arts Access Australia's first ever disabled leader within 18 months, so six months ahead of schedule. We also did it while leading a national campaign, calling on similarly non-disabled CEOs to do the same, to step up by stepping down and to get out of the way of disabled leaders taking on those roles and Arts Access Australia. There's been I think, three successions since then, but it's remained disability led ever since.

Jung: So you actually made the pay for them to sit. It's like you almost act as like a stepping stone for them to step up as.

Kate: Leader and not so much a steppingstone as I think. I mean, because it's it's, it's important when we're allies to take ourselves out of the equation. So it's not about me. It's about, you know, I had a little moment to raise awareness and lots of other people have done the same. Veronica Pardoe more recently has done a similar process stepping out of Arts Access Victoria and that organisation is now disability led for the first time in more than 40 year history. So it's not about being a stepping stone for disabled leaders, it was about recognising that they don't need a stepping stone, they actually just need people to not take their jobs. You know, it's actually people to get out of the way.

Jung: I think that's the more appropriate way to kind of describe it but you just I kind of recognise it as because a lot of the people, it's hard for them to create that momentum because it's normally flew as though they want to run as you used to be, rather than make the change because they when they want to make change, they feel like, Oh, is that necessary? Or I think it's hard to make the change, but someone has to break that. I think you, I think, stood out to break that sort of routine. Maybe.

Kate: So that's yeah, Well, I think what we can do as allies when we're talking about any, you know, being an ally for any underrepresented or marginalized group is that we can help have the uncomfortable conversations that we can. It takes so much it's so much cultural labour. And we often expecting disabled people or people from other underrepresented groups to do it all themselves. But we know that our organisations are institutionally inaccessible and we know that our society is systemically ableist. So we as if we as allies can take on some of that discomfort and we did make a lot of people uncomfortable around those situations. We got national media coverage and a lot of CEOs of leadership of disability organisations were calling me up and saying, Oh, it's a great initiative. You. You don't mean me, though, do you? You don't mean our organization, but I do mean your organization. If you are a non-disabled person leading a disability organization, I think you should think really hard about why and why you aren't doing yourself. Why part of your job isn't doing yourself out of that job. Yeah, and that's not to say that. I mean, we have a lot of we hear a lot of whining and excuses around this type of conversation about the fact it's tokenism when it's really not. We do have extraordinary disabled leaders in this country. We also do have systemic inaccess and ableism. So, yes, some people might need a steppingstone, but if those leaders aren't leading by example and creating those pathways, then that gap is never going to be breached.

Jung: That's really I think from my perspective, that's a very brave.

Kate: Yeah. I mean, it's quite possibly the best job I ever had. And I, Emma Bennison, who replaced me, is an extraordinary leader. She and I had very similar careers, very similar experience, and we made a short film about our transition experience and some of the weird responses that we got. Some of them were really focused on me and the were the throwing myself on my sword, being taking one for the team and leaving this job that I loved for the greater good, which is kind of missing the point a bit. You know, it's not about this altruistic, impossible, aspirational thing. It's actually about basic common sense and purpose. If this is a disability arts organization that celebrates disabled artists and practitioners, how on earth can we take ourselves seriously if we're not disabled lead? Then there was a whole tranche of people who got really medical model about it and started arguing back against me, stepping down because I didn't. I shouldn't discount my experience and I wear glasses and maybe I could just chop off a finger or stab myself in the eye in order to qualify for the job, which again, missing the point of the social experience of disability and doing it in a really offensive way. But in the film we made Emma talks incredibly eloquently about the fact that as a disabled woman, as a disabled leader and again this applies to lots of people who get accused of tokenistic appointment or tokenistic treatment that they not only have to behave on a level with everybody else, but to overachieve because the focus on them and that expectations around failure are so very high. So even though in in Emma in my case we were we were almost like for like in terms of experience, but she had this extraordinary body of lived experience that I couldn't hope to replicate. And yet we still got so much furore in the sector, mostly from non-disabled legal leaders feeling uncomfortable about their place and what that meant for them. So we are really proud that we've we helped some other organisations start that transition as well.

Jung: Thank you for sharing that. So how would you describe your overall experience in disability, your work experience in disability sector?

Kate: So I've been really lucky to work in a number of different capacities. So in London at Shape Arts, I was supporting a disabled led team about about around both arts practice but also accessibility so the Arts Council England much earlier. Well, Australia still hasn't caught up to doing it in the same way. But Arts Council England in the early 2000s made it mandatory that all funded organisations receiving federal public funding had to have a disability access and inclusion plan in place and sure that meant that some did a half assed job and put it in a drawer and really didn't look at it again. But it actually led to a huge revolution of people who took it seriously, which made an immeasurable difference around the accessibility of arts and culture across the UK. In Australia, it's recommended, but not mandated in the same, in the same way. So I've been really lucky to work on that supporting disabled artist to make work, supporting organisations, to be more accessible. Here in Australia I had this 18 month period where I was the voice and the face of Access Australia national peak body, and so I became a very visible advocate and ally and quite politicised in that space, meeting with politicians, trying to meeting with other organisations and making a bit of noise, as I always say, is change doesn't come from being polite.

Kate: So hosting those uncomfortable situations. And while I took on that 18 month job, it was a really particular moment in, in Australia. As I said, it was pre NDIS. Actually I was at Arts Access Australia while we were lobbying for the Everyone Everybody Counts campaign that led to the NDIS. So my leadership transition and advocacy and the advocacy around the National Disability Insurance Scheme were all happening at the same time. You know, Australia at that point and still while we've caught up a little bit with this advocacy around the NDIS, which is ongoing because of the ongoing dramas with that system, we still in Australia haven't had the same disability rights movement as other similar OECD countries have, most notably our most similar comparison to the UK and the US that they had huge disability rights, visible disability rights movements in the seventies and eighties, people in Washington DC getting out of their wheelchairs and crawling up the steps of the Capitol building and people in London chaining themselves to inaccessible double decker buses. We just haven't had, we, in Australia we are small, small and spread out population and we haven't had that disability rights, that movement to bring everybody together. So when I got back to Australia and took on the Arts Access Australia job, we were just gearing up for our first kind of wave of that stuff.

Kate: We couldn't even agree. We still can't really agree on what language to use around disability in Australia. Disabled people, people with disabilities. That's starting to resolve now and that's predominantly happening because there's more and more disabled people being published themselves rather than non-disabled people talking about them. So as we do, we're getting more of that social model, human rights model, pride model language which uses disabled people rather than people with disabilities. But when I started to ask Australia, that was I mean, it's only just over a decade ago, but a lot has changed in that time to the point where now if I was offered that job or a similar job or even just a job delivering some kind of disability awareness training, disability equity training, there is no absolutely no way that I would say yes, because it is no longer if I talk the talk around being an ally and a witness and getting out of the way. It was even awkward just to say yes for 18 months, 12 years ago, and it was definitely something I wouldn't do anymore. So now my way of being an ally is if people ask me about that type of work, I refer them to amazing disabled consultants or trainers or practitioners or artists. Sometimes I might co deliver with somebody, but it's always disability led because there's no excuses anymore.

Jung: Wow. Was this is something I just haven't heard anything like this. I read about it. But yeah, I think this is a whole new sort of chapter that I just kind of facing someone who is a really strongly recommend the job to be led by the person with disability. So this is the way I always struggle with academia. Which one is the term? We have to use it when we write. Articles. Disabled person or person with disability, but with the Australian standard for the third person who calling them should be person first rather than disabled unless they refer themselves as a disabled.

Kate: Yeah, so Australia, Australia has had a really strong person first movement when it comes to disability, but it was, it's really been driven by non-disabled people and the late great Stella Young, who was a great friend of mine, an extraordinary disabled artist and activist. She, I can't remember the, the quote, but she had this beautiful way of ridiculing that approach by questioning what it is that people thought was so important about insisting on person first. Was there some way because it implies that you could be mistaken somehow for not being a person, you know, should it? If we don't say person first, how are we not going to know that this disabled person is animal or mineral or vegetable as opposed to a human? So I recommend looking up Stella's actual quote on that topic. And this is one of the the symptoms of not having had a disability rights movement as comprehensive or as strong as some of those comparable countries, because there's a lot of disabled people who have never heard about the different models of thinking and talking about disability, let alone non-disabled people in that space.

Kate: So as I said, it's fantastic now that we're starting to see more disabled people writing and reclaiming the language themselves and being published. And that is due to some of those barriers to publication being very proactively taken down. But it means that actually disabled people like getting into the, you know, starting to lead those discussions themselves again. The next bit needs to be that those non disabled led organisations, disability services, academia, all of those who have been informed by these older out of date models also need to go through this revolution of getting out of the way and actually listening to the people who are evolving this work and this language themselves. There's amazing publications out in the public domain now. The black ink publication of Growing Up Disabled in Australia is a fantastic resource. Carly Findlay edited that and also published her own book. Jacqui Brown is an extraordinary writer on this subject and these are all strong and of course, Stella Young, before we lost her, was instrumental in getting some of these ideas out there.

Jung: And thank you for sharing your experience and the insight is so I can hear for like I can answer so many question, but I can go off the track. So I have to go back to questions.

Kate: I could just keep ranting.

Jung: Sorry where we are. Okay, so now what motivates you to be part of things in the sector?

Kate: So originally in London it was that applying for that job at Shape Arts and at that point it was that connection with my first experience of the social model for disability. So up until then I didn't know about the different models, but I very much only worked in kind of older school, community arts and cultural development models, which spaces which mostly use the medical model and the charity models or the medical model being the what's wrong with you model and the charity model being what's wrong with them model that pity or tragedy space. And a lot of those community arts and cultural development practices which were very white, non disabled driven practice of about 40 years ago, were working in in those kind of spaces. So it was work for disabled people as opposed to work by disabled people. So Shape introduced me to the social model for the first time and that was and the reason I remember so clearly where I was when I read about it and wanted to be involved was that all of a sudden when you start talking about the social model of disability, all of a sudden access becomes about access and disability becomes about things you can change so and that was so empowering, empowering for me as a non-disabled disability ally that when you ask a medical model question that what's wrong with you, you're asking you can't come in. You're essentially saying you can't come into my arts venue because you're a wheelchair user. So the fault, the blame and the impetus for change is on that individual disabled person.

Kate: In the social model, you're saying, Oh, you can't come into my arts venue because we don't have a ramp. So it's about the social environment, the behaviors and the physical space and that's so exciting and empowering because I can sort that. I mean, that somebody's personal condition or impairment is nobody's business but theirs. I shouldn't even need to ask about it but a ramp, I can do something about that and then you start getting into the human rights models of disability and not only can I do something about that, but that's about recognizing that I should and every single arts organization in Australia is beholden to the Disability Discrimination Act, the DDA, which says that we must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that our services and our opportunities are accessible for disabled people. Considering that disabled people make up 20 to 25% of the Australian population, it's pretty reasonable to make our make sure our buildings, but also our job opportunities, our leadership opportunities accessible for everybody so that brought me into this space and then I started getting involved with disabled artists in the UK. Grey Eye Theatre Company, headed up by Jenny Sealey is extraordinary world renowned theatre company, and I was working with a range of other companies as well, and I moved here back to Australia, got the job at Arts Access Australia and started getting involved with Australian disabled artists and disability arts and disability companies, both arts and disability and disability arts, as in the genre of the movement.

Kate: So both ends of that spectrum recognising that they're not always the same thing but yes, and then just being inspired by extraordinary people. So in South Australia we have Gaelle Mellis, who's one of Australia's preeminent disabled artists and disability leaders who is at Tutti now at Tutti, which is one of Australia's only now since she took over only disability led arts and disability organisations, certainly one of the only one here in South Australia, but also other extraordinary companies all around the country. Back to Back Theatre Company based out of Geelong in Victoria, is one of Australia's one of only two theatre companies in Australia with a permanent paid ensemble. They are, and one of the most internationally toured theatre companies in Australia. Regardless of their disability identity, they are not unfortunately a disability-led company and they don't have a majority of disabled people on their board but they're arts and disability and disability arts practice is extraordinary and changing minds and changing lives across the world. I've talked about some of the writers in Western Australia. DADDA WA is doing extraordinary work, including recently with an amazing actor called Julia Hales that's performing at mainstream festivals across the country. So I think I got in through the access and I've been and I've stayed in because of the artists, the practitioners that are just making extraordinary work. And then also from being really bolshie about the advocacy because we are catching up, but there's still such a long way to go.

Jung: Thank you. I just kind of was thinking about when. So all the people you've met, is there any the range of degrees of the disability? There are the physical and intellectual, and was it really broad when you meet lots of different artists with a disability?

Kate: Yeah, absolutely and one of the wonderful things about. Working within the social model of disability is that we ask when we, when we. When I was at Access Australia and working in those spaces, we only ask people to self-identify and we never ask people about their personal medical conditions or impairment. They are more than welcome to share and a lot of my mates, a disabled mates and colleagues, are very proud to be disabled people and it's a very, it's an inherent part of their identity and, but working within a social model and a human rights model space, all we need to know is that self-identification of the social experience of disability and then how we as organisations or service providers and employers can help address the, the barriers to that access. One of my favourite sayings is that the opposite, that when you start moving from that medical charity model into the social and human rights and affirmation models of disability, you start to realize that the, the opposite of disability isn't ability. The opposite of disability is access and equity and justice.

Jung: So you are almost like a witness of the evolvement of this. How the leadership of the disabled lead like a disabled artist to become the leader. And I just wonder is that most of them are like physical disability or some. How much involvement of the people with intellectual or disability? Because I also my main focus in the study area is the cognitive disability and then I also found often they are left out from that movement either because of their cognitive capabilities or just the curious, how far the in terms of the involvement of the leadership of people with intellectual disability. Yeah, in the current.

Kate: It's an interesting question, and I know quite a few disabled people who talk about the hierarchy of disability, which is kind of an amorphous idea and another uncomfortable idea, and certainly one I do not feel equipped to talk about as a non-disabled person but what I've learned and heard is and observed is that, yes, the way that people, organizations, service providers and so on respond to the challenges of the Disability Discrimination Act and the challenges of their community, responding to their community do tend to focus first on physical access, on the built environment, and then secondly, on sensory access, probably, so blind vision impaired, deaf, hard of hearing, deaf blind people. There's been a big increase in the last couple of years around mental health, and so that's starting to become much more apparent and the introduction of the NDIS cannot be under, the importance cannot be understated in in starting to disrupt that hierarchy of disability, because anybody who qualifies under the Disability Discrimination Act, which has a very when you break it down, has a very simple structure of the the. “How long have you had X condition or impairment? Is it does it have a significant impact on your life and is it likely has it lasted longer than a year or is it likely to last longer than a year?” So anybody of any kind of condition or impairment that fits those is eligible under the DTA and eligible under the NDIS, that includes neurodiversity, intellectual impairment, learning difficulties.

Kate: That said that cognitive and especially I think congenital cognitive impairments I think is the last real taboo, the last real bastion access bastion to fall. It is changing and organisations like Tutti, for example, Back to Back helping really at the forefront of that change and about recognizing neurodiverse and people with learning disability, recognizing their agency and their strength and the access requirements that they have in order to participate in these decision making roles or to order to participate fully as an artist or an arts practitioner so it's kind of like the last taboo and that's not to say that all of those other areas aren't fixed yet. We are still inherently inaccessible and ableist, and we still need all of us to be allies for that to change but yes, I think there's there's certainly different amounts of work to be done depending on your access and communication needs within that space.

Jung: Thank you very much for sharing your honest opinions. Yeah, because yeah, that was something I always wanted to kind of have a bit of a discuss in terms of the because I really focus a lot of the area and then I still see there are some in the way of the hierarchy.

Kate: Yeah. Yeah.

Jung: I feel like we still have like, like fair way to go.

Kate: Yeah.

Jung: But I see it as a there are big changes. Yeah. Plain English. And there are more accessibility people around. Yeah.

Kate: Just I had another thought on the question about why what attracted me and what kept me in. One of the things I haven't spoken about in in, in that range of being exposed to extraordinary disabled artists is of course extraordinary First nations, disabled artists and then and that's a fascinating, particularly fascinating area, not just for the artists and the practitioners themselves, but because obviously the understanding of disability is quite different in a First Nations context and First Nations communities, certainly behavioural and attitudes tend to be much more accessible than non-Indigenous communities. So and as such, people may or may not define in the same way, obviously the instance of conditions and impairments that might lead to an experience of what we consider in that Western definition of disability is statistically much higher within Australian Aboriginal population. So we've got a higher incidence of that experience but a different understanding of it and that's something that I am so grateful for being a witness of and and being able to learn from. I had the privilege of nominating Deon Beasley for for Australia Council National Arts and Disability Award a few years ago, which he was successful for. He's a young, extraordinary disabled man famous for his cheeky dog's drawings, he’s originally from the Northern Territory but we've also at the Andean was awarded for his work as an emerging artist, so he's quite well known now at the other end and recognising that I'm about to say the name of somebody who's just who's passed away but Gurrumul was one of our continues to be a high, extraordinary popular and high, highly successful recording artist in Australia. So we have extraordinary Australia's First Nations culture is, is a gift and an unparalleled but we have some extraordinary disabled artists in that space.

Jung: I know that one of the artists, the First Nation artist, at Tutti called Jacqui Saunders. I don't know if you know about Jackie. Jackie Yeah, No. So she's amazing artist too. Yeah. So maybe in the future I can send you some bio.

Kate: Yeah, I do. I do know one of the First Nations artists, but because I'm bad with out of Tutti Joshua, Josh, I'm very bad with names. It'll come back to me as soon as you leave.

Jung: Yeah. Was that okay? So. So next one is what do you think the public would say there's a key milestone or any big event within within the trajectory of the history of disability art in Australia?

Kate: Again, hard to say. One of the things that I was able to do during my time at Arts Access Australia was introduce its annual or it might be biannual now meeting place event, which is a national gathering, gathering of arts and disability practitioners and disabled artists. That's still going now more than a decade later at that, when we introduced it, at that time there was no national gathering and now there is several. So it's Arts Alterstate is a new collaboration between Arts Centre, Melbourne and Arts Victoria that's been running for the last couple of years. There's another festival that's run whose name I forget and I apologise for that, but that's run out of Accessible Arts in Queensland. Madeline Little has been involved in that, doing some extraordinary work and there is lots of other things happening all over the country now. Julia Hale's getting a headlining shot, spot in the Perth Festival as a disabled artist with her theatre work with DADDA WA could have been seen as a milestone. Back to back has been, as I said, doing extraordinary national and international tours for years. When Stella Young was still alive, she was editor of an ABC disability portal called ABC Ramp Up. We only had that for a few years, but I do think that was instrumental in lifting the level of discourse around disability, not just ours, but more broadly in Australia and also really help develop that next generation of writers who are now being published and who are now talking about disability in their own words.

Kate: So I think there are some of the they could be some of the key milestones and also the NDIS. The NDIS is an imperfect but hugely important system, again still run by non-disabled people and even the campaign that called for the NDIS That Everybody Counts campaign at that point was still very carers focused and focused on reducing the burden on carers rather than sharing the voices of disabled people themselves. That said, now we have the NDIS and now people are still fighting for it every day and it still doesn't make it easy to include artistic activities or arts support. If you're a practising artist in your NDIS plan, it is possible and if you are able to self-advocate or have someone who can advocate for you, you can now participation in arts and culture as an audience member, as an artist, as an arts worker or leader is now easier and more accessible for disabled people than ever before. So although that isn't an arts and disability specific milestone, it has, have had and will continue to have huge influence on Australian arts and disability practice.

Jung: So what do you expect for the next sort of decade?

Kate: I, I don't, there's a difference between what I expect and what I hope for. The NDIS has been fraught from the beginning and was such a huge step like Australia was starting from such a deficit position in its, Australia. If you're a disabled person in Australia, it's one of the worst places in the world. It's right down the bottom of all of the other OECD comparable countries in terms of worst places to be a disabled person globally, which is an absolute embarrassment and something we should all be ashamed of and we should all be collectively working to improve. So the NDIS, because we were so, such a deficit position, the NDIS has been such a hugely significant step change, but has also been seen as hugely expensive in political terms because it wasn't just about topping up a broken system, it was about starting from beyond, below zero and because of that, we're still seeing all of these issues around it and people can't get the access that they need or even applying for the NDAs can trigger it's inaccessible, not just inaccessible, but can actually set people back. So it's hugely complex and contested space. I really hope that gets easier. I really hope it doesn't get further decimated because it's seen as too hard. It's only just starting to catch up. We've got an ageing population, we've got an increasing, the pandemic has left an increasing awareness of mental health issues and long COVID issues of people that are going to need it more than ever before, let alone all the gaps that it hasn't been filling. So I really hope the NDIS stays, gets better, gets easier to access and starts to be led by disabled people themselves.

Kate: Without that, everything else just becomes much, much harder. And outside of that, when we actually talking about practice, I'm really, there's been a simultaneous revolution happening around the community arts and cultural development space that I talked about recently, and I was part of the team working on what is now known as the new how to guide for that sector called “The Relationship is the Project”, and that includes wisdom from Caroline Bowditch, who's an amazing Australian disabled artist and current CEO and artistic director of Arts Access Victoria in Melbourne. But at the same time as this revolution in arts and disability practice is happening, it's also been happening in broader community engage and community led , that move from that paternalistic charity model of let's help this poor person who is other than me, someone who's from a community or a group that I don't personally identify to the much more politicised nothing about us without us model. So regardless of which community, it's led by people from within that community. So I want more of that. I want more CEOs of arts organisations to to see that it's their job to to step down from their jobs. I want the disability service organisations to be at least 50% disability led in terms of their membership of their boards. I want more disabled people to be publishing not just about disability, but also about disability, using their own words and start their influence starting to change the way that the media and academia and organisations talk about disability so that they're no longer informed by non-disabled models, but they're informed by that grassroots community led practice.

Jung: The next question is about what do you think, not this is not the what do you think? Should art, disability, art or art in general become political?

Kate: I think all art is political in a sense. I think, even if it's a picture of a pretty flower, the act of self expression, of valuing the time it takes to create something, and then the value of then witnessing, enjoying that something is a very political commitment to freedom of speech and self, self awareness, self care, self expression so I think all art is innately political. I think once you start getting into the arts and disability and disability arts spaces, it's even more so and I use those two different terms quite deliberately. So arts and disability is I guess, any kind of involvement of disabled people in making or engaging with arts and culture, whether or not that art that they're making is about the experience of disability and so that arts and disability space might be participatory, it might be a leadership program like the amazing Sync leadership program that comes out of the Australia Council, which is based on a UK. Model. It might be a relaxed screening of a cinema with the lights up and, in order for it to be more accessible for people who don't cope as well with more sensory overloads. So all of that happens in the arts and disability space, disabled people engaging in arts and culture, arts and, and that is political because it's about access, because it's about recognising that we as humans have a duty of care to each other and we as organisations have a duty, a legal duty of care as enshrined in that Disability Discrimination Act to make our work accessible qnd so all of that engagement is about recognising that disabled people have traditionally and ongoing face more barriers to arts engagement than many people, and we have a responsibility to reduce those barriers.

Kate: So that's innately political because it's it's about our legislative and moral rights in making that possible. The arts, the disability art space is artwork made by disabled people that reflects the experience of disability. So that might be back to back. See extraordinary production of “Ganesh versus the Third Reich”, which was hugely uncomfortable, but wondrously so example of a play within a play. So when a group of intellectually disabled actors being directed by a non-disabled director, so it was a very clever and, and put the audience in a very uncomfortable situation but sent such clear messaging about the experience of disability and experience of disability in a range of those different models that we've been talking about, similarly here in South Australia, Gayle, Mellis's “Take Up Thy Bed and Walk” was an extraordinary piece featuring disabled actors, but that also was strongly informed by the experience of disability and that's political because it's taking that identity, that lived experience and putting it out in the world in the way that the disabled artists choose and in their own words and in and talking about it how they want, when they want to, who they want and we need more of that in order to change the minds and change the lives to get people excited about the access piece so we get more of that but I don't think we can have that without politics.

Kate: One of the things that happens a lot in any underrepresented or marginalized group is that the. the art that is informed by that experience often gets, you often get extraordinary art out of times of crisis. So the disability rights movements of the US and the UK in the seventies and eighties produced it extraordinary protest act around that disability arts movement. And that's in there is an archive of disability in the UK that tracks the importance and those milestones of those pieces of artwork which we don't really have an equivalent to here in Australia. We have milestones that are more events in coming to coming together, but we don't yet have the body not to actually. It's not to say that we don't have the body of the work, we don't have a place where that body of work is recognised and collected so that disability art, art, disability art movement is just as important as feminist art or the surrealist art movement. It is a moment in time and it's it's capturing the politics of that and the experience lived experience of that in a way that nothing else can. So that's I'd really love to see that. Something I hope for in Australia is that we start to identify those critical pieces of work and that could be Julia Hales theater performance is definitely one of those pieces. The “Growing Up Disabled in Australia” publication is definitely one of those pieces and there's many more but yes, I don't think we can have that conversation without the personal, and the personal is always political.

Jung: Ok, I was wondering, when you say like any picture of a flower can be political. What was going on? How are you going to answer that into like the making the connection with politics? Then suddenly just a speech of the freedom of speech and accessibility. There was, oh, yeah, expression, this kind of speech as well. Oh, yeah. That was, of course, the last question. So how would you define the success in disability arts?

Kate: Great question and again, lots of different answers and slightly different answers in the disability art space to the arts and disability space. Disability arts. I think success for me is access. Success for me is across the board recognition of these historical and contemporary barriers and acknowledgement alongside that, that equality doesn't come from treating people equally. We need to work with an equity framework which is about recognising that not everybody has an equal experience and we need to provide unequal support of whatever that might be to allow people to have that equal experience. So we talk a lot. We used to talk a lot about equality in the disability art space, and now we talk more often about equity and about justice and about rights. And that's really exciting again, because it's about things we can do, things we can do as allies and practitioners to move that conversation forward. So that might be anything in that disability art space might be somebody who just wants to go to their local theatre or gallery to see a show. So it's about recognising that those spaces need to be accessible. It's about recognising that we need more disabled leaders, so we need programs like the Sync Leadership program in order to nurture those disabled leaders. Specifically, we also need existing leadership programs to be more accessible and representative of disabled leaders. So we're not always having separate programs for everybody. We need accessibility across the board and we need specific targeted initiatives in order to breach that disparity. In the arts and disability space. I think success looks like visibility and disabled led practice.

Kate: So again, more disabled leaders and practitioners and decision making roles, more disabled artists and practitioners realising their creative dreams regardless of what those dreams are. So we, we quite often in the arts, we get ourselves a bit confused about thinking about it as a, as a linear narrative. So you go from participating to doing something with a small organisation, to being on a main stage show and yes, that can be some people's journey, but actually this is a perfectly valid outcome in and of itself. So it's not about making everybody go on that same trajectory, it's about making sure that disabled artists can, and leaders and practitioners can succeed in whatever part of that they're interested in. That said, we have had a long history of non-disabled people speaking on behalf of disabled people, of non-disabled actors, playing disabled people on stage and on TV, on non, non-disabled writers writing about disabled characters. So success is also increasing that visibility of more disabled writers getting published, more disabled actors getting roles on TV and in the theatre and. Excitingly, just this week, Chloe Haydon was named Marie Claire's Woman of the Year for her representation in Heartbreak High and her work as a proud, disabled autistic actor. So that kind of visibility is going to trickle all the way down to people working in that participatory space, seeing role models, not just of people with similar impairments, but with similar experience, that similar lived experience of the social impact of those disabling factors. And that's just going to build and build And build and build. Yeah.

Jung: Thank you. Thank you very much for your wonderful answer, which is like almost like I want to write it down like I call around it.

Kate: Well, I am always very thank you. But it's been a huge, extraordinary privilege to be a witness and I am proud of the journey. The difference across the sector in the last ten, twelve years since I came back to Australia but um I think it's still good that allies like me still feel discomfort around having these conversations because it's not about us and just here in South Australia, we're just talking about the extraordinary humans, extraordinary disabled artists and leaders. Joshua Campbell was the one I was trying to remember my list.

Jung: I messaged him and I emailed him but haven't heard anything back.

Kate: Oh yeah. So yeah. So he's another example. Yeah. So I am always happy to learn in my voice and to sit in discomfort and be an amplified others but I'm more thrilled that the number of people of disabled people on your interview list because we are so lucky in Australia to have such extraordinary practitioners and thought leaders leading the charge.

Jung: Thank you. Thanks very much. Is there anything else you want to add?

Kate: I don't, nothing I can think of. I feel like I could just keep going. But I can't think of anything in particular.

Jung: All right, cool. Thank you very much. All done. It's wonderful. Yeah, It was just perfect timing. Yeah.