



Transcript

Episode 20: Disrupting Ableism in the Workplace (51:03)

Dean Askin 00:00

You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. The podcast that explores the power of inclusion and why disability is an important part of the workplace diversity, equity and inclusion conversation produced by the Ontario Disability Employment Network with your hosts, Jeanette Campbell and Dean Askin. It's an ism, with seven letters. It happens in workplaces, in communities, and in society in general every day, maybe you have lived experience facing it.

Jennifer Crowson 00:38

Or maybe you've practiced it without even consciously realizing it. It's so commonly happening in so many ways that as American lawyer Haben Girma put it, it's often hard to identify, because it just seems so normal.

Dean Askin 00:54

Now Haben Girma, by the way, is the first person with a disability who holds a Harvard law degree. Hi, there. I'm Dean Askin, this is episode 20 of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. And that ism I mentioned off the top, is ableism.

Jennifer Crowson 01:09

And this episode, we're going to get a perspective on disrupting ableism in the workplace, why it's happening. It's many forms, impact and what can and needs to be done about it. Hello, I'm Jennifer Crowson at the other mic this episode, sitting in for Jeannette Campbell. And I have to say that for weeks, I've really been looking forward to this conversation.

Dean Askin 01:33

I remember the email Jennifer that you sent me when I was in the midst of lining up the episodes for this season. And you said you'd just seen our two guests in a lunch webinar and they had some great insights. And we should have them on the show. And well, here we are. You know, it's great to have

you filling in for Jeannette, welcome as co host. I guess this is kind of a new experience for you. Last time you were on the show you were answering questions. That was last season in Episode 10 by the way for our listeners, a great conversation about building a future of employment for youth who have a disability.

Jennifer Crowson 02:08

It's going to be a different experience asking the questions from the co-host chair and I'm excited.

Dean Askin 02:14

Well, let's get to it then Jennifer. With us in the guest chairs are Sree Nallamothe and Fran Odette.

Jennifer Crowson 02:20

Sree is the Co-Executive Director of Toronto Neighbourhood Centres. She's also a documentary filmmaker and a passionate storyteller, community builder, relationship builder and advocate for social change.

Dean Askin 02:34

Fran Odette has more than 25 years of experience in disability advocacy, activism and education. She co-designed and co-teaches a critical Disability Studies course titled Disability Discourse the Experienced Life at George Brown College in Toronto.

Jennifer Crowson 02:50

As we kind of mentioned at the beginning of 2024 Sree and Fran did a Maytree Five Good Ideas webinar, about five ways to disrupt ableism in the workplace. And now they're here on You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D to share their insights and perspectives on that ableism. Sree Nallamothe and Fran Odette welcome to the show.

Sree Nallamothe 03:13

Thank you for having us.

Jennifer Crowson 03:15

Let's get into this with the what question first. You know, the term ableism has been around for almost 40 years. But just a few years ago in 2021. Haben Girma, the American lawyer that we mentioned at the top of the show, the first deaf-blind person to graduate from Harvard Law School, she said in a magazine interview that the term ableism is still new to a lot of people. So what exactly is ableism? And how would you define it? What forms does it take?

Fran Odette 03:45

So ableism in the definition, that that I'm going to give is from the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Ableism may be defined as a belief system, and Legolas analogous to racism, sexism, or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate or have less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems for the broader culture of a society. It can limit the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities. I

want to also just say if I can, I think we have had 40 years. But I want to also say that I think disabled people have been around for much longer than 40 years. And so I I think, you know, we finally have a definition to an experience of prejudice and discrimination that I think many of us have experienced for more than just 40 years, especially in a world that does see people with disabilities who are deficit model. Sree, I don't know, if you have anything that you would want to add,

Sree Nallamotheu 05:27

I do want to, I do want to add that, you know, the approach that we've been taking together in the work we do within the neighborhood centers is a disability justice framework. And by the way, the definition we're working from comes from Patty Berne, who's the founder and executive and artistic director of Sins Invalid, which is a disability justice based performance project. And Disability Justice is an intersectional framework, which recognizes how ableism is connected to other forms of oppressions, and centers, the voices of disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queer people with disabilities, trans and gender non conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who've had their ancestral land stolen, amongst others. So I think bringing a disability justice framework and a conversation around ableism is really important.

Jennifer Crowson 06:35

I totally agree with both of you and really appreciate those perspectives that you bring to this conversation. You know, so what why do you think that, Hey, Ben Graham has said that ableism is new to people, and this is only 2021. Especially given what you said, Fran?

Fran Odette 06:52

Yeah, I mean, you know, I think for those of us who had the lived experience of disability, ableism isn't so new. I do think, however, we are now seeing what is often a common experience, as really being a form of oppression. And an essential part of EDI work is also a newer component. And as a result, I think that the conversations do see the importance of including information about ableism similar to other forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and so many other areas where people experienced discrimination.

Sree Nallamotheu 07:42

Yeah, I mean, it's, it's the language, right, it's, it's, as we start, you know, having language that helps us sort of talk about things, I think, you know, it's helpful. And I think maybe the language, like a more sort of shared language to sort of address some of this stuff is, is what's newer. But I agree with Fran I think, you know, obviously, this is not a new thing, right? No,

Jennifer Crowson 08:14

Absolutely.

Dean Askin 08:15

You know, I want to sort of pick it up here and, and sort of come off of something that that that you said, frown, you know, you said, you know, people with disabilities have been around a lot longer than the term ableism men and have experienced things. I mean, tell us what ableism is a means to you on the on

on that personal level? I mean, we know what kinds of things have you experienced that, that are that are ableist?

Fran Odette 08:42

I don't mean to be funny when I say this, but like, where do I begin? Honestly, you know, I think that I have always experienced some form of ableism even as a young child, and definitely, as a young person, you know, being not quite seen as fully whole, or fully human. Assuming that when I'm waiting for wheeled trans, there, I must be, you know, out on the street, asking for money. I mean, I, I mean, this was tongue in cheek, but, you know, occasionally I've made lots of money, just waiting for wheel trans, simply because someone assumed that that must be what I'm doing. And that I need it more than they do. And so, you know, I think really at the core of that whole experience is this belief that who I am, is defined by my impairment, or what people perceive as my impairment. And also because of that, I am considered as many of us are as being somewhat inferior to non disabled people. And so I also want to have a think about this idea of ableism is that it's not just around disability, it's also experiences around autism. So the belief that hearing people are, you know, privileged, and that deaf and hard of hearing people all want to be hearing. And the idea is well around the notion of Satanism. So thinking that there are, quote, unquote, typical ways that mental health is experienced for many of us. But we also know that mental health, for lots of people can be quite precarious, and is not well understood. In the larger society. And again, it's something that is steeped in myths and stereotypes.

Dean Askin 10:55

And for so long, the saying these kinds of things just weren't talked about. That was a powerful insight. Sree, what does ableism mean to you?

Sree Nallamotheu 11:06

I don't know that I can add much more. You know, I think Fran summed it up really well. But I mean, you know, I think about it is, you know, a lot of gross assumptions about what we're all supposed to look like, think, like, be like, like this idea that we all, you know, there's like some ideal model of what a whole human being is, I think. With a complete disregard for, you know, the variety of ways we show up in this world.

Dean Askin 11:49

Those are both powerful insights, you know, and I guess it's a challenge. I mean, that's something I want to pick up on, you know, something else Haben Girma said in that 2021 interview she did with Africa Renewal magazine, because that was what she said, it was the headline of the piece. And she said, the biggest challenge is ableism, not my disability. What do you think about that? Oh, whoever wants to jump in? And answer that.

Fran Odette 12:17

I think this is such a powerful headline, because it really is demanding that we, as a society, move away from the medical model that does uphold ableist ideology, and sees the disability within the individual. And so if the individual can just do x, then they will be able to, quote unquote, overcome their disability.

But in contrast, I think what this headline is saying is that it really is the prejudice, and attitudinal barriers that contribute to both the physical and environmental, social barriers that are disabling. And so you know, that would be what we would call the social model. The social model really challenges us to see the problem of disability outside of individual, and really see that attitudes are behind the barriers that are created in the physical environment, and also the social environment. And it's not to say that impairment doesn't exist, but that it's just part of being human.

Sree Nallamotheu 13:34

Beautifully put, Fran.

Jennifer Crowson 13:36

I agree. I don't know, sir, if you have anything to add to that. But I want to take us even a deeper dive, you know, it's 2024, you know, and we're in the middle of the third decade of the 21st century. You know, why did either of you think or want to comment on why we think ableism in the workplace is still happening?

Sree Nallamotheu 13:57

I mean, I think it's because it's deeply embedded in the way we think about productivity. You know, one thing that comes to mind is, is, you know, like, when when we can't show up for work, for leave, we are, we need to take some time off for whatever reason. We're, it's always sort of looked at as failing the system, right, versus the system failing us because there's no room for us to sort of, you know, care for ourselves in the ways that we need. So I think I mean, a lot of it is ableism shows up when, you know, we think about who we are in relation to what we produce, right? And only in relation to what we produce or not producing. I also think there's, you know, just a lot of resistance, you know, and and if it's easier to ignore that it exists, right. And it's easier to just sort of default to the status quo. Because it's a lot of work right to sort of that self reflective process about how we see each other how we keep ourselves from othering each other. It's hard work to do. And I think sometimes we're especially in our sector, you know, there are a lot of fires, people are putting out every day, right in the frontline work that they do. And we're not given sort of the opportunity to sort of think about reimagining the way we show up for ourselves as co workers, as well as, you know, the ways in which we deliver programming and services, I think we need to think about how we can do things differently. And if we're not making time for that, then it's not, we're not changing, you know, the culture of our workplaces.

Fran Odette 16:04

You know, as someone who is on the other side of receiving and being impacted by ableism, as well, as a disabled person. I think there's a lot of just comfort, to have these really difficult conversations. I think people think they know what ableism is, but there's a lot of literacy in a lots of different sectors around what that language means. And how part of our efforts to address and begin to eradicate ableism is to be really mindful of our language. And how language even on its own can be ableist. Because we tend to use that language to talk about deficiencies. And we may use that language that describes other people's experiences through that particular lens. You know, like, it's so crazy out there, like, or, you know, What a lame idea that was? And can we not come up with other other ways of describing what is going on other than using language and categorizing people's lived experiences? In such negative ways?

Dean Askin 17:33

You know, I can sort of sense the frustration in your voice. And, you know, as you were answering that, I mean, how frustrating is it that, you know, all this ableism in all of these forums, is still happening and in 2024, and that, it's still difficult to have difficult conversations.

Fran Odette 17:54

You know, I've been on this planet for, like, 60 plus years, so you don't get a long time. And, um, you know, I can't say that there's been a lot of change in terms of the impact that it does have, for folks with disabilities, to be always having to do the emotional labor, of responding to ablest incidents that might happen in a workplace or elsewhere. And I think you know, that the underlying issue and why it's so frustrating is because there still is this belief that disabled people, whether we are your colleagues, whether we are your customers, whether we are your third party, whatever you call it, as soon as you get a sense that we have a disability, there is a change in someone's perspective, even though they may like not want to admit it, that there's always this underlying view that is centered on less than or deficit. And, you know, there's a real sort of undermining, I think of people's experiences, when they are able to, you know, achieve leadership roles, that somehow they must have done something extra, because how could they be a leader and also have a disability? And, and so, yeah, I mean, there's always this feeling, you know, from my perspective, of having to be better, I have to be better than my non disabled peers, because I'm much more dispensable than they are. And that's pretty much the belief that I think lots of us encounter in our workplaces, unless we are in workplaces that really value and appreciate people's contributions on multiple levels rather than just through a capitalist lens? Three, I don't know, it's our is your perspective and are doing this work together? What do you think?

Sree Nallamothu 20:14

Yeah, I mean, I think I think I think the one of the more frustrating things is the idea that, you know, in doing the work, thinking of it as an add on, right, so when we have time, we will think about this form of oppression, versus thinking about, like, you know, this is, this is it doesn't exist, because it's not on your plate. Right? It's it doesn't. How do I say this? What like, yeah, just the idea that even in doing EDI work, that the A is missing, you know, accessibility is missing. And, you know, I mean, there are some fantastic advancements in that, like, there's some fantastic advocates like bringing that, more attention to that. Right. And I think people are, are hearing it. Now, more than before, so that that's really great. But I think it's frustrating to think about, always, even before you get to the work, having to make an argument for why this work is important. I think that that becomes you know, frustrating. Because it Yeah, it's a strange thing to talk about why? You know, I don't know, I just have to make an argument, right, that, that we shouldn't be doing this. Another sort of observation that I've noticed in the past year and a half friend that we've been working together, is the number of folks who are quiet about or don't, aren't comfortable, right, revealing disabilities that they live with, right? Because it's not a safe environment to do that. And it's not safe, because we, you know, it's the ways in which we, like you were describing, we just sort of default to judging people. And even if we have the language, we say all the right things, I think, culturally, your right friend, like, there are still ways in which we categorize

people, we put people in hierarchies, right of value. And I think that that's something that that, you know, to do this work to talk about this, it really has to start with culture change, you can put all the rules and regulations in place, you know, you can put all the sort of policies that address discrimination and harassment, all of that in place. But then, you know, until we sort of make a culture shift, those things do not live, right, in ways that are beneficial to everyone.

Dean Askin 23:25

Do you think all of these different forms of ableism? Do I mean, is it intentional? Or is it does it just mostly happen? Because there's such a lack of awareness, and people are able to just without even realizing it? I mean, is it like even Chroma said that there are lots of examples of ableism. But they're just hard to recognize just because they seem so normal?

Sree Nallamotheu 23:50

I mean, I don't I don't think it's a question of intention, I think we need to start talking about impact. So impact versus intention. And when we sit in that place of intention, it just sort of it's a, it's a way of like, you know, stalling the actual work, that it requires of us, the self reflection that it requires of us the changes, you know, that it requires of us because we all have work to do, right, whether it's like realizing how it shows up in ourselves how it shows up in our communication. How would you know, so So I think it's important to sort of think more about impact. And I don't know, it's, it's interesting question about like, also, the idea of normal, you know, that's another question I have is like, what is what is this idea we have of normal and is that even healthy? And maybe it started to Start thinking again, you know, sort of differently about like, what do we mean by normal, like normal itself becomes a challenging term? Normal to who? And I think, you know, one of the things, if we are able to move it from in, you know, intention to impact, I think we can also start to think about how, you know, oftentimes when we do this work, we're accommodating the learners, right? At the cost of people who are doing and people at the cost of people who are we are asking to teach us, right. So when we bring in folks and ask them to share their lived experience, as a way for me to learn, that's, you know, thinking about where, who's paying the cost of this? And then what is my role as someone who needs to sort of do better be better? Learn more, so I can do that? You know, I think about questions. I don't know, friend, does that make sense? Like the idea of, of where the, the labor lands? Right. We think we're centering the voices of people with lived experience, but what really, we're, you know, it but it's, it's a dangerous sort of, you know, and and what's the word? It's, it's kind of a dangerous line, like you can easily overstep,

Jennifer Crowson 26:31

I think you're making a lot of sense and I don't know, Fran, if you have anything to add? And I mean, really, our next question was, you know, what is the impact of ableism? And you've just answered that question, you know, and you I like this distinction between, you know, intention and impact. And that's such an important thing for us to consider, you know, So Fran, I don't know if you want to add anything to that, you know, in terms of the impact of ableism. But I, I felt that that was a really interesting perspective you were bringing there, sorry.

Fran Odette 27:01

I mean, I have a couple of things that I want to add. And that is, you know, the fact of the matter is that even qualify for disability is not a particularly sexy thing to talk about. And I don't mean to make light, I think that it brings up feelings of discomfort, you know, for learners. And I think that there's such a fear of making a mistake. And as someone who is in doing this kind of training, and we're, you know, sometimes I wanted to say, like, make the mistake, because the more that you hold on thinking that you won't, you're going to do something that is going to be not a great experience for the person that it will land on. Because you didn't get a chance to unpack that before you came into the conversation. And I think that when I'm feeling, you know, another impact of ableism is the fact that I always question myself, as someone with a disability, like, Did that just happen? In this training? That was like so blatantly? ableist? And am I the only one that saw this? Am I overreacting? How do I respond to what just happened, which is, you know, bringing up feelings for me in a way that responds in a respectful way, that also lets that person not leave the room not knowing the impact that comment has had on me as a trainer, or who else is in the room who may not have disclosed the disability? Right. To me, it's my it's a lot of labor. And it also comes with cost. I think for many of us, do this work, and I don't think it's valued, yet. But it's getting there. In the same ways, when we do EDI.

Jennifer Crowson 29:11

Fran, you know, you we know that you work with organizations and pointed out ableism that's happening in those workplaces. And what's generally been the reaction when you've done that?

Fran Odette 29:25

Oh,well, you know, imagine, right, I mean, I think we can imagine, what's it like when you've been, you know, someone points out that you actually aren't accessible. And perhaps you have been presenting your company or your program as being Uber accessible. And then someone comes in and said, Ah, you know what, here's some things that you could do difficult. You can either sit with that and be comfortable, and go, Okay, thank you. I hear DOD? And what can we do? Or I'm going to be defended. And I'm going to say all the other excuses that I can say, such as well, this is in our building. And, you know, we're only here on a temporary lease, and, you know, so on and so forth. Like, I get a range, I'd much rather, you know, I go in always prepared, that I will get some kind of defended response. And, and how do I then try to navigate through that, so that people will continue to stay open, or the suggestions that I want to make around how things could be battle. But I have to stay, you know, there are days, when I can, while you're while I'm doing this work, I want to see more change. I don't want to be going into an agency where they can check off their, you know, officers, and so they've done the training, and then nothing action happens without a piece of paper that says, This is what the issue is, and your responses. Thanks so much. But we can't do any of this. So

Jennifer Crowson 31:13

What what would your reaction be in that situation or solution perhaps if you've come across and you know, if an organization says this is not possible for us, what might be some solutions or reactions to that?

Fran Odette 31:27

I think I you know, I think because, you know, don't know, st if you've got something that you want to add to that, but I think for me, I will continue to ask that they be accountable. You cannot do this work,

without recognizing that you are going to have disabled people coming into your space, whether that is as a employee, whether that is as your boss, or whether that is as a, you know, service user client, member of the public. And, and you don't want to go to court, do you, you don't want to have a human rights battle with somebody over something that actually could be quite fixable. Or could be quite navigatable, if you are open to that, um, you know, I sound like I'm really like, woowoo on this, but you know, sometimes I have to like taper my, or temper my frustration, and say, you know, here's reality,

Dean Askin 32:41

I guess it's all about getting people to think differently. So I mean, I know, you've kind of mentioned this, but I want to bring it out a little bit more. I mean, you know, what mind shift has to happen out there to stem workplace and society, but ableism what's the aha moment that everybody has to have?

Sree Nallamothu 33:00

I think, and I'll share my aha moment, I think that that really shifted things for me. And it was thinking, you know, making this work about the environment, and not about individuals, you know, because when we see it, see it as the environment, we can change it, you know, and change that narrative around, you know, having, you know, people need to overcome or be fixed or cured, or whatever, you know, all those sorts of ways in which we, we make it about individuals, right? That it's up to the individual individual to make this work. And when we make it about individuals, we absolve ourselves of having to do any of the work, right. But when we look outside of, you know, it's when we look at it, and think about it as the environment and environmental barriers, those are things that we can change. And, you know, to the question of Brown, you know, what's your reaction when there is that sort of resistance, or people think that they're, you know, doing the work or doing enough of the work? It's, it's, you know, asking them, if it's a priority or not, right, I think it's simply making it a priority. And when you make it a priority, then you will do the work, right. But there's no, you know, there's no solution to be had, if people are not making it a priority.

Fran Odette 34:40

I kind of want to build on what's really saying, this idea of priority. And I think one of the things that I often say to folks is, so let's just say that you have an accident after our meeting, and are you going to actually be able to come to Work is there is that because you're going to be able to navigate the stairs to get up to your office? You know, I really try to get people to realize that disability is not in us in them. It is everyone's experience. That, you know, most people who move through the world, as non disabled are only in that place temporarily. Because, you know, disability can occur through accident or illness, or aging. And so it's not something that really, if we are lucky enough people, that we will be able to avoid such an important point. So why are we so busy avoiding something that many of us will encounter a really

Jennifer Crowson 35:52

Important point there, Fran. So both of you did the Maytree Five Good Ideas webinar, which I attended, and it was fabulous. And you talked about ways to disrupt ableism in the workplace. So what do you think are the keys to start stemming ableism? And what has to happen?

Fran Odette 36:12

I mean, you know, it would be great. And I hope that there'll be somewhere in this podcast, at the link to that talk could be provided. Because, you know, I think there are things that are from that talk, that we've also covered in this conversation as well. But I do, you know, one thing that really sort of resonates for me is be prepared that you are going to have people come into your space, don't operate from a place of reaction, that really think about being proactive, so that people can come into your space, feeling welcomed, and that they can feel a sense of belonging. When people are so busy having to accommodate me, I feel less welcomed, even though they may interpret your efforts as welcoming me, there's this idea of specialness, or othering. That happens, that doesn't sit well with me, and I'm less likely to come back.

Jennifer Crowson 37:21

Thank you, Fran.

Sree Nallamothe 37:23

I mean, I would just add that I mean, it needs to be resourced. I think this the the changes that we need to have happen in our workplaces need to be resourced, both with time and training, it needs to be part of our core budget, to make it part of our core work.

Jennifer Crowson 37:45

Great. I think actually, you've both kind of touched on really my next question, which is, you know, what's one critical message that you want business leaders or anybody else listening to this podcast? To take away from it? Is there anything you either of you would want to add to what you've just pointed out in terms of really some key big messages?

Sree Nallamothe 38:06

Yeah, I mean, I think we need to be accountable. I think, you know, don't make disability an add on or something, you get to win. And if you have time, but make it you know, like I said, a core part of the work you do, I think we really need to foster a culture of trust. And we need to listen to the voices and lived experiences of disabled people and center people who are most impacted by multiple forms of oppression, to work for, you know, a more just society that we're all striving for. And I think also in friend, you can maybe add on to this, but just sort of understanding that it's all fluid, right? Like the work is never done, in a sense.,

Sree Nallamothe 39:00

Yeah and I think the work is never done. And I think that if we try to always reach a goal, it means that there's no room for any innovative ideas that can come afterwards. We've done what we've done. And so now we don't need to think about it again. And I think that we always have to revisit these conversations, and we can't just do a one off. I also want to just add, if I can, very quickly to this idea around fostering a culture of trust. And I think, you know, one of the things that keeps coming up both in workplaces and I think elsewhere, is this idea of people having to prove themselves when they need an accommodation and I you know, I think that that is the old way. And we really can think about trusting that people know what they need, that disability is not static, and that it will change, and does change. And this idea of having to prove yourself in order to get what you need to be able to do your work. I think also, then it's very undermining of people's own expertise. As opposed to relying on, you know,

some kind of documentation that comes from somebody that might have met that person for only 15 minutes. Well, the person who's asking for the accommodation knows themselves all their life. Right? I mean, I think that it's really important that we kind of really disrupt this idea of professionalism. And who really is yeah.

Dean Askin 40:57

Great point. I mean, you know, we've been talking about the way things are now. So let's look ahead a little bit. I mean, what do you think? Well, we eventually get to that point where our workplaces and you know, indeed, society as a whole, I mean, is it ever going to be like, you know, you saw it on Star Trek The Next Generation, and there's no ableism? I mean, I'm going back here, and I'm thinking about the character of Chief Engineer, Geordi LaForge, with his visor on the bridge crew, and everyone just carried on business as usual, on the bridge on whatever started, it happened to be, I mean, what's your hope? What do you envision?

Sree Nallamothe 41:35

Well, I mean, I don't really think about the future, I sort of think more about the present. And what we do in the present, I think, tells us where we can go, and what we can accomplish. And when I think about the future, it's with my kids in mind future generations, and what we want for them, and that informs what we need to do now. So I'm sort of very focused on the present and not this idea of, you know, by this time, it will, we will eradicate all of these things, but and, you know, ultimately for me, it's just about seeing the humaneness in each other. And, you know, there's a I, I'm Indian, and in my country and and it's in, grounded in Hinduism is a term Namaste. Which I think a lot of people are familiar with as as a greeting, right? And, but the meaning of namaste is, the light in me, honors the light in you. And I think, I think that's, for me, that's my mantra in terms of like, how I approach this work. In all of this work, right, all of the anti oppression work we're doing if we can sort of think about, and see each other's humaneness, and start there, in the present time, where we are we, you know, we might not there's something more powerful to me around that, and working, where I am situated now, with the people that I encounter now, in the situations I am in now. More power in that for me, and inspiration in that then some far off goal of imagining a world without any of this. Because that seems, I don't know, that can start to feel impossible, right? But what makes things feel possible is when you start to see the way in which people start to interact with each other differently. As we learn this language, as we become more sort of aware of, of the kind of, you know, shift we want to make in terms of the way we look at each other. Moving away from othering. I don't know like I see, I see small things we do every day. I think even with my colleagues and in our learning and in this journey, been on for the last year and a half the small things that are we call them small, right? Because this big shift hasn't happened but they're powerful, right? And they're the it's the only way you're gonna get to something bigger.

Dean Askin 44:37

Fran, are you an idealist are looking ahead or or are you pragmatic?

Fran Odette 44:43

I would love to stay in the present. I'm not really very good at it. I do tend to look to the future. And I would agree with three that you know, there have definitely been changes. Absolutely. Um, I think one of the things that is meaningful to me is that I think we have to, you know, as a community, and as

younger people are coming, you know, into, you know, thinking about what their lives would look like, I think many times, young people with disabilities think that the work is done. And, and it is it, it isn't done. But how do we I've seen, you know, myself as an elder has been doing this stuff for a while. How do I support a young person to not give up on themselves? Because I think that is really what can happen when you continually bump up against barriers that you thought someone else had done, or around.

Dean Askin 46:00

Great points, great insights from you're both I mean, we've talked about a lot, you've had a lot of great insights. Just before we wrap it up, have we covered all the key points and essentials? What do you think? Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is important to mention? Just before we go,

Fran Odette 46:19

I hope the conversations will continue. I hope that there'll be more conversation coming out of this one that people will take into their lives. I think that's how change can happen.

Dean Askin 46:34

Sree?

Sree Nallamotheu 46:36

Yeah, I agree Fran. I think that's a great note to end on.

Jennifer Crowson 46:41

Fantastic. I mean, this has really been a great conversation. And I think and a really important one to have, you know, I really appreciated the perspectives that both of you brought to our conversation today, you know, particularly this idea of disability justice, and really needing to not shift but to widen the way we're talking about and having this conversation. And to understand those different intersections, you know, that individuals face the, you know, the other thing was this tension, you know, about not being comfortable to speak up, but, you know, to talk about what you might need in order to be successful in your job, you know, and seeing that with a kind of human rights lens, and how actually, that's how we're going to get the best out of people as if we best understand how to best support them in their place of employment. So I was really, I was really interested in that kind of tension that I think you both really so eloquently, and, you know, pointed out, and I think it's something we have a conversation we have to continue. So I really wanted to thank you three, and Fran, for coming on the show and sharing your thoughts and insights about this ism. You know, that is certainly a barrier to people achieving their full potential. And, you know, I am an optimist, you know, and I'd like to think that this conversation really is going to help people start making that mind shift that needs to happen in order to allow, you know, those individuals with disabilities in our community, our community to reach their full potential, which we all know is possible.

Sree Nallamotheu 48:06

Yeah, thank you so much for having us.

Dean Askin 48:09

Thanks for me, as well to Sree and Fran, for coming on the show and talking about this with us. If you Sree and Fran's webinar about disrupting workplace ableism, we've put a link to the recording and the transcript in the show notes for this episode,

Jennifer Crowson 48:27

Along with some other links, where you can learn more about ableism and what employers can do in their workplace.

Dean Askin 48:33

That's right, Jennifer, check out those links. And let's all try to start making the mind shift needed to break down the ableism barrier. And you know, I say that as someone who not only has multiple invisible disabilities, but as a professional communicator who's become a lot more conscious of the turns of phrase I write, and I like to write some colorful ones sometimes, as Jennifer knows, I'm not afraid to admit it's a constant challenge. Every once in a while you think, yes, I nailed it. And then you go, Oh, no, wait, that's ableist language, isn't it? Or somebody's looking at your copy. And they point out to you that it's ableist. And you say, oh, jeez, you're right. I didn't even think of that when I wrote the sentence. I'll change that.

Jennifer Crowson 49:19

It's kind of like a simple math equation, more awareness and conscious thought, equals or should equal less ableism. And on that mathematical note of disrupting ableism that's it for this episode of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. I'm Jennifer Crowson. And I have to say, it's been fun guest co-hosting this episode.

Dean Askin 49:42

It has been fun, Jennifer, thanks again for sitting in at the other mic. I'm Dean Askin and thanks again to you out there for listening, wherever, whenever and on whatever podcast app you're listening from. Join us each episode as we have insightful conversations, much like this one and it's Our disability inclusion in business and in our communities from all the angles. You Can't Spell Inclusion without a D is produced in Toronto, Canada by the Ontario Disability Employment Network. All rights reserved. Our podcast production team, executive producer and host Jeannette Campbell, producer Sue Dafoe Associate producer and host Dean Askin audio editing and production by Dean Askin. Our podcast theme is last summer by Ikson. If you have feedback or comments about an episode, contact us at info at odenetwork.com. That's info@o-d-e-n-e-t-w-o-r-k.com. Join us each episode for insights from expert guests as we explore the power of inclusion, the business benefits of inclusive hiring and why disability is an important part of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion conversation. Listen to You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D on Podbean or wherever you find your favourite podcasts.