



Transcript

Ep. 21: Making Campuses More Inclusive (52:59)

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Dean Askin 00:03

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. There are more than 200 universities and more than 200 colleges and institutes in Canada. Certainly no lack of choice for young people looking to pursue post secondary education. But there's a problem on campuses across this country. Hi, I'm Dean Askin and this is episode 21 of You Can't Spell Inclusion without a D. Thanks for joining us. The problem on campuses is one affecting students, staff and faculty alike.

Jennifer Crowson 00:55

It's ableism a lack of accessibility and disability inclusion. Hello, I'm Jennifer Crowson sitting in again for this episode for Jeannette Campbell. Jay Dolmage who's an associate professor at the University of Waterloo, put it bluntly in 2022. He said that in a University of Toronto Scarborough campus news article about the second national dialogues and action for inclusive higher education and committees.

Dean Askin 01:23

By the way, that's a national one day forum that happens every two years, to gathering of people from across the higher education sector and outside experts from the community where they talk about inclusion issues in the post secondary system.

Jennifer Crowson 01:37

That's right, Dean. And out of that 2022 forum, Jay Damage said, and I'm paraphrasing here, the way things are now on campuses isn't sustainable. And if things don't change, our colleges and universities will keep losing staff, faculty and students who have a disability.

Dean Askin 01:55

That change will have to start somewhere. And that somewhere could well be at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, an award winning research team of professors at U of M set out to break down barriers to inclusion for students and faculty at the university who have a disability. The project is titled, dismantling ableism and promoting equity for persons with disabilities, institutional action and accountability.

Jennifer Crowson 02:23

It's one of three recipients of the inaugural Robbins-Ollivier Award for Excellence in Equity. The \$100,000 award is funded through the federal Canada Research Chairs Program. The project's lead is Tina Chen. She's the University of Manitoba's first executive lead, equity, diversity and inclusion.

Dean Askin 02:44

Professor Nancy Hansen has also been involved with the project. She's the director of U of M's interdisciplinary master's program in disability studies. And she's got lived experience with the inclusion problem on campuses as a university faculty member who has a disability.

Jennifer Crowson 03:02

And as a part time University sessional instructor myself, I have to say, I've really been looking forward to this conversation with Tina and Nancy about this issue. And this project. Tina Chen and Nancy Hansen, welcome to You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D.

Tina Chen 03:18

Thank you for having us today.

Jennifer Crowson 03:19

And I'll kick off with the first question. So this is kind of a prestigious project. You were one of the three recipients of the inaugural Robbins-Ollivier Award for Excellence in Equity \$100,000 in funding, what's the driving force behind this project? So what would you say? Look why we've got to do this project. Why is it so important? I know who wants to kick off?

Tina Chen 03:44

Well, I'm happy to kick that off first. And then allow Nancy to certainly add it to this. But I think, as you said, I was the inaugural executive lead for Equity Diversity Inclusion at the University of Manitoba. And it was very interesting to step into this role because it was framed sort of as I was given to around EDI. I come to this work very much from a lens of anti racism, and so very well aware that there's a long standing critique of EDI work as centering whiteness. And certainly as I was thinking about what doing this work institutionally might mean, I was you know, I've had the great fortune of being at the University for over 20 years working with colleagues like Nancy, and others who are in the Disability Studies program and also those within the disability community. And so well aware that scholars of disability studies and the disability community activists have for a very long time offered a powerful critique of existing EDI frameworks. They've always drawn our attention to the ways that disabilities, people with disabilities are seen as add ons. They're never really centered in the work. You know, the whole framework of EDI as accessibility gets added to the end. We don't even talk about ableism as a system

of oppression. And so certainly when I took on this role, it seemed like it was a necessity to center it and when this program came forward We actually took a moment to review a lot of the existing funding programs, even with Canada Research curers programs. And we identified that, you know, embedded with all these programs is also an ableism. And so we took it on as a bit of a challenge, we put forward an application with a team. And we offered a critique not only of what's happening at universities, but actually at the various programs that were set out to fund this. And we were pleasantly surprised when they gave us space and money and time in order to be able to kind of explore what would it mean to take action, but also, I think, to bring forward ableism as one of the systems of oppression that all universities need to address as we work to dismantle oppression and narrow gaps. So that's really why why this because ableism, is never centered as one of the systems of oppression. And we need to do that if we're going to seriously restructure our universities.

Jennifer Crowson 05:39

That's great. It kind of lends itself actually nicely to the next question is, you know, what's the scope of the project? You know, what are you looking at Broad? Or, you know, are you looking broadly at the state of disability inclusion at the University of Manitoba in campus? Or are there particular things you're focusing on more than others?

Tina Chen 06:06

Well, I'll jump in there, too. I know, Nancy, will have a number of things to add. But we sort of, you know, obviously, \$100,000 Sounds like a great amount of money. And it's not really that much. And one of the goals of these, of the Robins Olivier fund is really to think about institutional action, and things that we can make sure we do within a shorter timeframe. So we were trying to be realistic in that way. And so we have three pillars that are really driving this project. The first one is to ensure that we're understanding diversity within and amongst people with disabilities. And we're very well aware of there's such great research out there, there's so many sort of the literature is really rich, but whether it's survey work or others, it tends to be aggregated at a very high level. So not just differentiating, or talking about the different needs, the impacts of people with different disabilities. And so we really, we've undertaken a survey, and work that we know requires a lot of trust by people in the disability community, but really trying to say, we conduct we can disaggregate, we need to know what the different types of experiences are. And I think that's where it aligns us with an intersectional approach as well. And so this is really unique, we're really excited the results from that study are, you know, just we're getting to the final stages of analysis. So that's kind of one pillar that is meant to inform all the rest. The other is really about policy policies, embed ableism all the time. And so thinking about what do we need to do if we're going to have policy review? And what would it mean, to think about equity impact analysis tools, and resources that we really saw come to the forefront and anti racist work, right, everyone was calling for the need for racial equity impact assessment tools, and universities, institutions, corporations, we're all getting on board saying we need to use this tool. And as important, as I think it is, to think about racial equity, we can't do it outside of thinking about disability and ableism, as well. So we've actually created a comprehensive equity impact assessment tool, that the first group to be considered would be people with disabilities rather than the last and really forcing people to think differently. So that's a pillar and now we're doing all the how are we going to teach people to use this tool so they can center that? And then institutional work? What do we need to do? How do we need to reorganize ourselves? What would that look like? So to begin to do that work? And so that's those are

the kind of three pillars of institutional structure policy? And then what is the kind of disaggregated data that we can bring forward that will help us prioritize over a longer term?

Jennifer Crowson 08:31

Fantastic. Nancy, did you want to add to that?

Nancy Hansen 08:34

I think too, it's about Yes, I think it's an opportunity to we can't do things the way we've always done them in the academy. And it's an opportunity to get away from problematizing disability, to an opportunity to get creative, to do things differently, because the way they've been done, has worked with exclude all kinds of marginality is and not not only disability, and I think what he has said about developing an an intersectional approach is pivotal, because nobody's just one thing. And I think that this is an opportunity for the Academy writ large to get to get out of its comfort zone, and start to look at things differently. Because historically, disability hasn't been expected in the academy. And whenever, whenever we show up, it's a surprise, right? So rather than rather than looking at this as something to be compliant with something to, you know, a problem to be dealt with, just expect disability from the get go. And this is what we're working toward, to to create an academic space that's welcoming and inclusive on both sides of the desk.

Dean Askin 09:44

I kind of want to jump in here for a minute. I mean, how would you describe the state of disability awareness and confidence and inclusion on the U of M campus and indeed at other campuses across the country? Nancy, I'll throw that one at you.

Nancy Hansen 10:01

Okay, um, well, I would say there's work left yet to do. People have to develop a, a comfort level around disability and recognize that doing things differently doesn't in any way compromise the, the way the Academy has been thought of, and it's an offer it, it's an opportunity that benefits everyone and disability has always been present on campuses, whether it be noise, or there's been a safe enough space to talk about it is another thing entirely. And I think this goes well beyond the University of Manitoba to universities across Canada and globally, because I'm involved in several international organizations that deal with faculty, staff, and students on campus, and they're all talking about the same thing. So this is an exciting opportunity. And hopefully, University of Manitoba is at the vanguard for this.

Dean Askin 11:00

Tina, I can see you bursting at the seams wanting to add something to that.

Tina Chen 11:05

Well, I was just thinking, get one help, which we've all learned from Nancy, in those in disability studies on how to think through this. And you know, so I think as I always entered his conversation, I'm really mindful of acknowledging those who I think even before we're able to take on this work, held all of us accountable in different spaces. I'm forever using Nancy's phrase when I'm out in places where people say, What do you think the problem is? And I said, it's because you don't expect disability and disability

is everywhere. And you need to learn to be, you know, you need to learn to embrace and expect that. And so I always have Nancy's voice in my mind as we're doing that. But I was thinking a little bit about part of this project, we've had been doing a public speaker series. And what was really fantastic is our final speaker, Agnes Burfoot reference, who's at York University shared with her thoughts on what she called a disability manifesto for academia. And in her thoughts as she thought through this, what she was also linking the issues to, and often, you know, the kind of what's the state and the kind of confidence and awareness and a sense that we're maybe getting better at recognizing that people with disabilities are present. But we don't really want to acknowledge how ableism is part of our very structures, and she really wants to talk about how notions of performance and productivity are always already folded into a kind of ableism the way that we think about certain bodies as rational, or irrational thinking or not, and then thinking about the intersectional one, and so well, as Nancy was thinking, I was thinking, Oh, this question, I was also just, you know, coming back to the power of agonises words with all of us. But I think, also my excitement about this project, because it allowed us to bring speakers in who brought these different perspectives and sort of said to us, like what's going on at universities besides just a project that needs to be done? But how is it actually a product of how we even think about who we are and how we do our work?

Dean Askin 12:54

So we've been exploring the what, but I want to get at the why a little bit. I mean, why do you think there's still so much ableism and lack of inclusion on campuses and in academia? Can I take a stab at this? Yeah, Nancy, jump right in there.

Nancy Hansen 13:10

Okay, I would say that the society in general, particularly Western society has, has still heavy duty, discomfort around disability and disability issues. And otherwise, again, regularize the presence of disability. It's going to become more a more regular part of the whole societal experience and the Academy as part of that. And I think too, it has to do with, with hiring, hiring disabled staff and faculty to a to that we are supposed to be on campus, right. And the more we can get society comfortable with the presence of disability, and recognizing ableism, for what it is, and something that needs to be dealt with, and not not simply the way we've always done things because that that doesn't work, we have to really think that the presence of disability necessitates creativity, and it's going to benefit everybody, just not the disabled person, society. I really mean the society is enriched by a by the presence of disability and the fact that, well, we're winning five in Manitoba, we're the world's largest minority to begin with. And that is not well understood, either. Historically, we've had a very individualized, hyper medicalized approach to disability and disability issues. Right. And I think the more we understand that disability is disability rights are human rights, and it's a social justice, human rights, social citizenship perspective, that's going to help But everybody and recognizing the natural place of disability wherever it is, and this is why this project is so important.

Jennifer Crowson 15:09

I agree. So so there was a 2023 January 2023 report, and it was called the state of the schools report, a report on the state of Canadian post secondary education and accessibility. And it was by the National Educational Association for disabled students. And it said Post Secondary Students frequently

receive ineffective accommodations due to insufficient systems and procedures. So why is the system broken?

Nancy Hansen 15:41

Can I start?

Jennifer Crowson 15:43

And I know Nancy, you touched on some of these things? Yeah, please. I mean, you were touching on that, please. I

Nancy Hansen 15:48

would say it goes back to what Tina was saying at the very beginning that historically, this was disability and disabled people have been treated as an add on or afterthought. So there's, historically on campuses, there's been the unknown and understanding, misinformed understanding that disability, well, there's only one or two of them, or two or three of them, we don't really need a lot of, you know, a lot of resources, but a lot of them and I'm using air quotes here. And that sort of idea is outdated, but it's sort of entrenched. And there's still an underlying sort of concern. I think that's very rarely articulated that the presence of disability somehow undermines the eliteness of the institution. And that would work with any, any other marginalized population group as well. People are kind of uncomfortable with the presence of marginality on campus. Right. So I think that there's been sort of a sort of aft approach to accommodation. And also there's been a hyper medicalized approach to disability too. And a lot of disabled people don't see disability as a medicalized issue, right. And we have to all of that thinking needs to change. And that's why the project is so important, because it's changing the way we think about the presence of disability. Yeah.

Jennifer Crowson 17:24

Tina, did you want to add anything to that? Yeah,

Tina Chen 17:26

I think, you know, one of the things we're really trying to do with this project is we understand accessibility and accommodations being key aspects of the work. But that's really kind of as I see it, kind of the service fork, right? That's, that's what do we need to be providing supports like we do for all people on a university campus? And that the continued existence of ableism that focus on the barriers? What are we doing to address systemic inequities to narrow those barriers, and that's where the real work has to happen. So that's why we have part of thinking about policy as well, but also recognizing the important work that are done by the service units, really, who are working case by case. And I think, you know, we might talk about it later. But certainly, the original responses, or the kind of the first set of data that we're looking at is that people with disabilities across our campus really respect the individualized supports they're getting? Well, they also have a critique of the limits of thought so that and it's because there's really no time of the day for many of them to work systemically to work structurally to work on that kind of redefining the institution and think about, well, how is ableism there? So you get a set of policies, you inherit them, and maybe you're doing an excellent job implementing them? And I would say for many people, obviously, no one that's less than satisfactory, right? They're talking with their living that experience. And so through this work, we're trying to think about what what

needs to change with the policies and practices. But I also think it is that mindset, it's about saying, you know, valuing that disabled people know their experience, we don't need a medical opinion to tell us what it is that we don't need to sort of think about some external expert. And I think that reminds me of how Agnes talked about and things that Nancy has published and worked on the idea that some people know other people's experience better than others. And this is also where I think there's a huge potential just for action in so many realms, because it's also what people from all systemically marginalized communities tell us, people who experience racism tell us they know what racism is, right. They know it intimately. People with disabilities know ableism. And I think this is where we can create that kind of common ground and understanding because I think one of the other shortcomings is that always all institutions have don't have enough resources, or people don't have enough hours in the day. And so what tends to happen is a competition for resources a competition for time, in which people perpetuate kind of hierarchies of who is more valuable needs to be seen at anytime. And if we can understand more the way that those systems of oppression are linked together and the way that our solutions also have to think Talk about them together, I think we'll do a lot better. And we'll begin to address that kind of, you know, why the system C inefficient why they don't seem to do enough, because we won't be asking people to sort of claim one identity over another or to, you know, go against what is really social justice and Disability Justice, the recognition that we're all human beings, and that we want to send your humanity. If

Nancy Hansen 20:20

I can just add one more thing, too, is that when the when the when the system was set up for students with disabilities on case it was initially set up for 200 students, and now they're dealing with 2600 students, and there hasn't been a commensurate increase in their resources to deal with that number of students. And I would argue to that, that is not by no means represents the actual number of disabled students on campus. Because there's a certain there's a certain reluctance to self identify because of the the social understanding or lack of understanding what disability is, more importantly, what it isn't.

Dean Askin 21:06

So I want to jump in here. I mean, Tina, you know, you mentioned earlier, when we were talking all the institutions, and hundreds of institutions, you know, I'm wondering if that's part of the problem. I mean, every post secondary institution has its own guidelines and policies and procedures on accessibility and accommodations and disability inclusion. I mean, is that a big part of the problem? Does there need to be some kind of uniform guidelines for all colleges and universities to follow?

Tina Chen 21:35

Well you know, I can't talk about every institution. But I would just say that, well, we all recognize that things like legislation, are really our minimum baseline criteria that we should be meeting, it's been really interesting for me to see here in Manitoba, we are now as of May 1, needing to be compliant with the accessibility for Manitoba and X Communication and Information standards. And I think about the diff, I'm situated differently in the university. So that might be part of it. But I also just think I see a shift at this moment, in the way that we're engaging the whole process. So what does it mean to be compliant? What kind of education? And what questions do we need to answer and I'm hearing so much more conversation of where's the, you know, let's talk about ableism. This, how does this work with other policies? How do we need to think about that in relation to broader issues of equity and

social justice? And so I see a really a change, and just, you know, our very way of thinking about it? And I think that's where it's important, where I think, well, you know, I'm hoping other institutions in Manitoba are having that same one. Because we have this unified set of guidelines, we all have to do it, whether no matter what kind of institution you are, and I think those are kind of important, as kind of minimal frameworks. And thinking from other places, you know, we spend a lot of time Nancy, me, members of the team, looking at what's happening in other universities. And I would say, you know, I'm floored and so excited every time I go to the University of Greenwich website, and I look how they're structuring it framing and the kind of work that they're doing around it. And I think there's a real power to being able to exchange ideas to think about it to have a series of broad commitments that help us hold our institutions accountable, that help inform us. So for me, it's that kind of shared conversations, knowing what other people are doing, how they're addressing them. But in Canada, given that education is a provincial, one, I think it's actually very hard to come up with a set of guidelines that we implement all across. And so, you know, imagine things like the Scarborough charter on anti black racism, setting a set of shared guidelines, work that we all need to do that we commit to do and reporting back in, I think that's been a powerful framework. And currently, I feel like in Canada were a little bit more oriented. And perhaps this is because of Nancy's networks to the UK. And it feels like they're ahead of us in this work. They're really in terms of institutionalizing it. And I'm hoping that we can kind of follow in that way and see what we can develop.

Nancy Hansen 23:49

If I could just add one other thing. I'm, I'm really hoping we can move beyond compliance at one point, I think, I think its compliance is very important, but that's not enough. I think we have to move beyond the stuff that we're being legislated to do and just move to the next move to the next plateau, if you will.

Jennifer Crowson 24:11

Great. So you've mentioned lots of things, but what are some of the key things that you've been discovering or uncovering about the lack of disability inclusion on campus through this work?

Tina Chen 24:24

Tina, do you want to go first? I was gonna let you leave on that all share in from whatever you want to say.

Nancy Hansen 24:32

Let's see. Well, um, there's a lot of there's so a lot of work to do. I've been in the US for 21 years now. And there has been some progress but there's a lot of progress yet do I think that people often the disappears sort of a continually evolving entity so that we can't do just one thing and think that's done. There. There has been a sort of, we're moving beyond ramps and toilet now, which which is great. But, and I think the fact that we're having this conversation right now is important. But I think it has yet to sort of get deep into the university mindset that disability is present, and it's here to stay. And the presence, the presence of disability enriches campus life, again, on both sides, that I think there has to be a faculty and staff are also disabled. And that's okay.

Jennifer Crowson 25:43

Tina, did you want to add anything?

Tina Chen 25:46

Yeah. And I would say, I think some of the things that we're really seeing as we sort of expand this project, and it gives us the opportunity to talk and hear from really more staff, students and faculty is that, you know, one of the ongoing issues continues to be trust, trust that the institution will value people with disabilities. And so a reluctance, both because of societal stigmatization, the ways in which medicalization come into play, questions of, you know, career trajectories, um, experiences here, and how we've always defined success in an ableist mode, all of those come into play. And so I think when we hear that kind of, it's often at the base, when someone's explaining something else to us about their experiences as a disabled person, in the community, the university community is really this lack of trust. So really, I see that as not something that we're learning, that's new, we know it's there. But I think always a reminder that our actions matter, because we have to build trust. And I think the other thing that I really, you know, have become aware of is, as we move more and more to kind of digital spaces, you know, whether it's the ways our documents circulate the types of materials is that software continues to be a barrier for so many. And this is a compounded problem in so many ways, because, you know, we buy them, companies promise you that they're accessible, they tell you that they have all these things, or quite frankly, companies only make them available as an add on at a really high price. And so, you know, part of me looks at I'm like, Well, how much can the university? Do you know, what I think about? What would I love to see that, you know, companies, when they put out software need to make sure it's fully compliant, and accessible? And if it isn't, then they shouldn't get to sell it? Like, you know, these are like this, of course, my pie in the sky one. But the idea that you're then having to test it, again, to ask about, you know, for different types of users, what are the limitations? What are the barriers, and so right now, I feel very much we're still on a case by case problem solving of that as they come up. And I think it's, you know, it's bigger than the university, but we're certainly part of that. And when we think about procurement, testing, what our responsibilities are, but certainly the software, the interfaces, the kinds of expectations, and the way that impacts, you know, his work life, student life, that seems to be one of the things we're hearing about a lot. And, of course, when we look at disaggregated, because that's what we're doing, that the needs are so different. So for some certain technologies are enabling for others, they're, you know, that they're not dependent, particularly when we think about neurodivergent, SSI or mental health, some people with chronic health because it's such a diverse one. So also that reminder that there is no one solution. And we're going to have to be as Nancy always reminds us incredibly creative and innovative, so that we're making solutions for multiple people at the same time.

Jennifer Crowson 28:31

So many important points. And what both of you are saying there, is there is there anything that you've learned or discovered, that you weren't expecting to as part of this project, either of you can jump in on this one.

Nancy Hansen 28:45

To make people more comfortable with it in the first place. But it goes back to the whole whole trust factor again, because there are so few people that self identify on campus, even though there's a lot of disabled people on campus, people are afraid to participate. Because if, if they're afraid that their self identity will cause victory, professionalism, ability to complete courses, I and there are serious personal

consequences, whether one identifies or not. And I think that's something that the university is beginning to grapple with. I think that there has to be more of a loudspeaker approach to like we really mean it. This is not just a one off thing. This is this is the way we do things now, and I think that it's coming but there there was work that needs to be done, that it's safe to be on campus that it's safe. You know, there will not be negative have consequences if you self identify. And you have to begin beyond quantification. Right? We have to move beyond quantification to how does this change things, rather than simply quantifying difference. And that's the way any kind of marginality has been approached on campus. And I'm when I say campus, I don't just don't mean the U of M, I mean, nationally and globally.

Tina Chen 30:29

Then I would say, you know, the things that, you know, we're either unexpected, or that, you know, surprise me in doing this work and engaging, I kind of a positive and a negative on one hand, really pleasantly surprised at the extent of constant engagement. And that once we were able to kind of just open the door a little bit, that it the willingness of people with disabilities and various forms of disability or chronic health to come and be part of the project and sort of say, I'm willing to work with on this has been absolutely amazing. So seeing the excitement and the kind of, you know, I think a bit of relief. Finally, you know, there's some kind of, you know, something might happen here, and I, you know, let's say every burden, and I think I think we're up to it as a team to at least keep things moving. But I, you know, that's been really exciting. And I see it then having kind of reverberations in different spaces. So, you know, Nancy will know about this, because one of her colleagues, but you know, a book project by Christine Stewart with, out of feminism and disability writing one where the students read pieces, creative works, that on their stories, it was one of the most phenomenal events I've been to, because it was a public space at the university. And students were sharing incredibly thoughtful kind of reflections on their own identities. As students with disability, it was amazing. And I just sat there thinking, I couldn't even imagine this five or 10 years ago, that students would have that trust. And so I look at those. And those are the moments where I think this is going to gain the momentum, it's going to do the work. Unfortunately, on the other side, the other thing that surprises me, every time I hear an example of this is resistance. I don't understand the resistance to accommodating people and valuing and seeing the humanity and people with disabilities. And I guess maybe that's a good thing that every time I hear one, I'm still surprised, I think, why would they think that. But I think sometimes it's not necessarily about being a bad person, but it's the misunderstanding of the value of doing the work of being accessible. Think about universal design, and people understand it is just something a burden outside of them. Because they don't really think as Nancy said, right from the beginning, that disabled people are always here, they will always be here. And that we need to think and we need to recognize that. But I guess, you know, that's the part that surprises me every time is when someone says I've never thought about it, or I don't really agree that this should be a priority.

Dean Askin 32:45

It sounds like you've got kind of both ends of the candle happening out there. Now you've got some really enthusiastic people who want to share, but then there's the hesitancy. You know, I'm kind of guessing that a project like this can create some awkward conversations about disability inclusion and awareness. You know, is that happening? What what kind of feedback are you getting overall?

Tina Chen 33:11

Well, I would say on this feedback, actually, mostly positive feedback, in that, you know, like all projects like this, people engage there want to see it succeed, they want to do the work, they want to learn with others. You know, as I was talking about the speaker series earlier, began with Rihanna Robertson, who talked about an indigenous model of disability, we had Robert recruit, who really talked to the intersection of queer studies and disability, and then Agnes birthlight, Radford and Black Health Equity disability studies, and the different people who came out for each of those and that idea of hearing people we can think and learn together. So I think there really is we're seeing positive responses. Were a lot of questions. How am I going to learn more about this? By learning? Questions, we've To taking down is that part of it, she'll talk about what kind of feedback you're getting. But it's also put other groups there's an action on anti evil is an action group that's like, what else can we do? So what I also see is other people taking it up, and many of us working in the mode that you want to get those who are going to commit and make that kind of get the momentum going. We want to bring in as many people to learn with us as possible. But if we spend too much time just thinking about where the kind of resistance might be, we often stay stalled there. And I think that's one of the lessons that I bring to this out of all my experience and kind of anti racism and a broad range of equity work is that you you know, you pick where you want to start, and you really want to build a strong community. And I'm excited about that because I think we do see much more on the positive side and that kind of enthusiasm, or at least relief that it's happening and a desire to be part of it. Nancy, hopefully I don't know what your experiences I might be The same or different?

Nancy Hansen 35:01

I think it's really important what's happening. And I think one has to look at how well universities are historically based based on tradition, right? And the stock answer is, well, we've always done things this way. And that the most important question, and then sometimes the most dangerous question you can ask is, why? Because people are uncomfortable with changing things, because they have to really understand why this is beneficial. But at the same time, you have to ask, Why have things always been done this way? So we're sort of, we're sort of mixing things up and getting people to really reexamine the way things are done. How, how has traditional practice, kept certain groups of people out of out of universities? And how can we change universities and colleges? How can we change that? You know, and all of this benefits, everybody? And that's what people have to understand.

Dean Askin 36:08

Tina I remember when we were talking before the show, and you mentioned that the funding had been extended until the end of the year? And that was a good thing, because it gives you a chance to bring everything together? Yeah, I know, when this all wraps up at the end of 2024. And you do your report, and you report your findings, and you make your recommendations. What do you think, what do you hope the results of this project will be?

Tina Chen 36:36

Well, I think we already are seeing some of the results. So as I said, we've created this comprehensive equity impact assessment tool. So I'm really excited to start seeing that in place. Right. So what does it mean every time somebody wants to create a policy, that the first question that were asked is, How was this going to impact people with disabilities? Is it going to be positive or negative? And what do you

need to learn? If you don't? If you can't answer that question yet, and here's where you need to go first, before you just start asking a few people, and then when, and so that what learning is needed. And I'm really excited, because I think that's gonna bring about a new practice, it's going to be and we hope to see that kind of expand not just on the sort of capital P policy, but then how do we do that from when people are creating guidelines in different ways? How do we bring that into our everyday practices, and thinking intersectionally working through them. And in that one, our goal is also that when you finish, you go through and you go, okay, you know, we're all realistic, sometimes you have to prioritize certain work. So if you've prioritize, you know, revisions or kind of addressing certain kinds of inequities, then you're going to say to the next people who are doing this, okay, this is what we did this is as far as we got, what's left to be done. And I think, you know, we all know in institutions, that turnover is pretty significant. So we often reinvent the work over and over and over again. And so we're hoping also to embed a way that those questions and understanding are ongoing for a longer time. So that's one of the things and you know, our plan is to be sharing this, we're going to get underway to share it across the country, both from other people's feedback and to be able to tweak it. So that's one of them. I think we also really are excited about the way that we'll be able to tell a story of the experiences of people with disabilities since disaggregated, we really want to be embracing that. You know, that's Ken has new guidelines on disaggregated data. And for whatever reason, people with disabilities have always just been kind of homogenized in all of these studies. And we want to be able to do that. So we can lay out the priorities. So I think in terms of long term work, we also want to be saying, what does our university look like? And how can we determine what are what are the priorities, knowing that there's limited resources that at least in these first steps are going to have the biggest impact, and then to also say, what is left undone so that we have that list flowing, that we can constantly reassess that we can work with? Because we're mindful project based funding often means you do a lot of work, and then it doesn't have that long term framework. So that's also we're trying to think about how do we embed this across our institution and luckily, doing this project aligned with the university strategic planning. So also commitments to kind of think about equity and all forms of Justice are in that plan. So we hope we'll be able to hold a university accountable by thinking about what are we committed to in the work we do?

Dean Askin 39:16

Nancy, what do you hope is going to happen out of it all?

Nancy Hansen 39:19

I just want people to think that disability has a natural place in society has a natural place. In the academy, and this, I look at this as a as merely the beginning of something rather than when the project comes to an end. That doesn't mean what we're doing comes to an end. It's just it. It's a starting point, but it's by no means the completion because there's that much work to do, but the important things are we have a starting point.

Jennifer Crowson 39:51

So many important points. And interesting and exciting I think are going to come from this project. You know how optimistic are You both at eventually there will be a day when campuses across the country and academia in general, are truly disability inclusive in every respect. And there won't, in fact be a need for research projects like this.

Nancy Hansen 40:15

The fact that we're having this conversation in the first place, is it illustrates how things are changing, right. I think it's important to that that disability is now on the EDI continuum, because for the longest time, it wasn't right. i And I think that the whole the project is endemic of the change that's happening to right. So we have a long way to go. I don't think it's something is ever finished. This is an evolving process. But I think that it will, the presence of disability will no longer be be seen as disruptive to the natural thing, the quote unquote, the natural way we do things now, if we can see disability be not as problematic anymore, not as disruptive anymore, but just simply there. And to be sort of addressed in the possible, right, as opposed to being problematized. That's where I want to be that you don't have to go through this whole rigmarole that disability is expected from the get go.

Tina Chen 41:33

Yeah, thanks, Nancy. And just to add to that, I guess, you know, I don't think of this as an idea of optimism, really about something going away. I'm a historian, and I'm a historian who, you know, studies things like colonialism and racism and feminism's. So I tend to think more in terms of the political potential of different moments and spaces. And so is this a moment of opening? And will we be able to through our work by kind of taking advantage, I think of this moment where, you know, funding is available, we can take on projects, institutions are interested in starting this work, can we make it foundational enough, so that it's always present, where there's so that we're always looking for those political possibilities of opening of creating better conditions of reflecting on them. So it's never kind of an idea of the research not being necessary. But you know, what I do really hope for is that in 20 years, when someone's in similar positions to Nancy and I, that they're not doing the same version of this project, that they're doing some fundamentally different project that has been able to build on this and sort of, and to, you know, continue to move things in new and more important and inclusive ways. And I think that's my hope out of it. And at this moment, I'm, you know, wildly optimistic in the Canadian context that that's possible.

Dean Askin 43:00

I think all of us Canadians are pretty optimistic, all the time, or most of the time, aren't we? I'm gonna make your reach into the top hat, so to speak in right now and take out that one slip of paper, I mean, what's the main message that you want? Anyone involved in post secondary education? You know, and we're talking both in teaching and administration, who may be listening right now? What's the one message you want them to take away from this conversation?

Nancy Hansen 43:31

I would say expect disability.

Tina Chen 43:34

Yep. And I would say, you know, develop an understanding of ableism know how it operates, take action to you know, sort of work against it and understand that ableism is one of the multiple systems of oppression that people live with and that institutions reproduce. So it's our responsibility to sort of take action, to counter it and to dismantle but really to narrow those gaps.

Jennifer Crowson 43:58

Fantastic. What about young people who have a disability who are already pursuing post secondary education, or who want to get a diploma or degree in an environment that's not really all that disability inclusive, you know, what's your main message to them?

Nancy Hansen 44:14

I would say, speaking as a disabled person who is not young, but speaking as a disabled person, I would say, Be proud of who you are. Keep pushing forward, just because just because nobody's ever done something that way before doesn't mean you, you can't do it, and recognize that you're not alone. Find allies where you can make it known when you when you have encountered a barrier that you're having difficulty with, and just, you know, be proud of who you are and recognize that the Academy is a better place because you're in it.

Tina Chen 44:53

Yeah, and I would just add to that, you know, a message that, you know, all people belong and that they belong here and are valued And to sort of echo Nancy's, when you encounter those barriers, even though we know that the burden of always advocating yourself can be really substantial, find the allies that within even though institutional institutions can feel overwhelming in their kind of policies, they will, that there are, you know, supporters, there's other people in the disability community here at the university. And that's a growing community. And but they're also significant allies and supporters. So find those people so that the burden of advocacy doesn't fall only on you. Because that's, you know, I think, a really important step of ensuring that, you know, of that belonging and being valued.

Dean Askin 45:41

Wow, you've really both brought up some really great and really important points. It's been a great conversation. And it kind of brings me to my trademark question. What I'm the one I was taught back in Journalism School, the last question you got to ask, you know, we've had a great conversation, we've talked about a lot. Have we covered all the essentials? Is there anything we haven't talked about? That we should mention, before we wrap things up here?

Nancy Hansen 46:09

I think we've touched on everything. But I think we have to really, really focus on ableism is something that needs to be dealt with. And that's why I think this program is so important, because I don't think people really do wonders. A lot of people really do understand what ableism is. And I think that people have to start deconstructing the way they think about disability. And this This project is, is a positive element in and really assisting with the whole detection process. So patronizing a blues, I don't think that's really important.

Tina Chen 46:46

And I am happy for to have had Nancy have the final word. Thanks, Nancy.

Dean Askin 46:52

Nancy sort of brought us back to Episode 20. You know, you mentioned ableism, and we just did a show on ableism in the workplace, and why it's happening in all its forms and what needs to be done

about it. So if people haven't heard that episode, yet, they might want to have a listen to that one as well.

Jennifer Crowson 47:08

That's great. Thanks, Dean, I want to thank you both for coming on the show and talking to us about this really important, interesting and exciting project, you know, about the whole issue of inclusion on campuses with us? Yeah, I was writing furiously because you gave so many fantastic soundbites. You know, Nancy, I think you commented about how not expected in the academy, you know, that's such a powerful statement. You know, but everybody belongs and some of the messages and passion that each of you brought to this conversation, I really, really do appreciate it. And as we're talking, it's the end of National Youth Week 2024. So this really is an important conversation to have, because through our work on Oden's Youth Success strategy, we know that there are young people who have a disability, who want to pursue post secondary education, and the lack of inclusion on campuses can be a real barrier for them doing that. I mean, statistics show that about 27% of working age, Canadians without disabilities have a university degree. But only about 17% of Canadians who have a disability have some kind of diploma or degree. So hopefully your project and again, it's called dismantling, ableism. And promoting equity for persons with disabilities, institutional accent, action, and accountability will lead to systemic change, not only at the University of Manitoba, but on other campuses across the country. So again, thank you, Tina, and Nancy,

Dean Askin 48:43

Thanks from me, as well to Tina and Nancy, for sharing their insights on this. You know, the wheels of change tend to turn slowly, whether you're talking about large corporations or large institutions like your universities, I guess it's mostly because there are just so many layers and processes and approvals and systems and people involved. And I say that from experience as a professional communicator, who's worked in the corporate world where it's sometimes took three months to get a three paragraph message from the CEO approved. But hopefully, what you're doing with this project at the University of Manitoba will get those inclusion wheels of change, turning and moving forward there and other academic institutions.

Jennifer Crowson 49:25

Speaking of moving forward, looking ahead to later this month, we'll have a broader look beyond university campuses at the overall state of accessibility in Canada. That's part one of a two part series coming May 28. Don't miss it, because we'll be getting a perspective from three of the leading voices on accessibility in this country. Jeanette Campbell will be back at the mic for that next episode. Until then, that's it for this episode of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. I'm Jennifer Crowson, and I've really enjoyed guest cohosting back to back episodes with you Dean.

Dean Askin 50:03

Well, thanks for sitting in for Jeanette for episode 20. And this one, it's been great co hosting the show with you. And you'll be back in July for a third stint at the mic for episode 24. You and I will be getting a perspective on inclusion from a photographer who's being intentional about creating images that authentically portray disability inclusion, and from the inclusion specialist who's helping her do that, you know, I'm a bit of a photographer myself, and I know you and I are both looking forward to that

conversation. I'm Dean askin, and thanks again for listening, wherever, whenever and on whatever podcast app you're listening from. Join us each episode as we have insightful conversations like this one has been unexplored disability inclusion in business and in our communities. From all the angles you can 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 Iksen. If you have feedback or comments about an episode, contact us at info at odnetwork.com. That's info@odnetwork.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. Well, thanks for sitting in for Jeanette for episode 20. And this one, it's been great co hosting the show with you. And he'll be back in July for a third stint at the mic for episode 24. You and I will be getting a perspective on inclusion from a photographer who's being intentional about creating images that authentically portray disability inclusion, and from the inclusion specialist who's helping her do that, you know, I'm a bit of a photographer myself, and I know you and I are both looking forward to that conversation. I'm Dean askin and thanks again for listening wherever, whenever and on whatever podcast app you're listening from. Join us each episode as we have insightful conversations like this one has been and explored disability inclusion in business and in our communities from all the angles