



## You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D

### Transcript

Episode 30: Intersectionality Part 3: Disability in the Newcomer Community

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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, Jeannette Campbell and Dean Askin. Hello there, and welcome to the show. This is episode 30 of You Can't Spell Inclusion without a D, our final episode of season five. The newcomer community in Canada is huge in 2022 this country welcomed 431,645 new permanent residents, the largest number in one year in Canadian history. The last time we welcomed that many newcomers was over a century ago, in 1913 Hi there. I'm Dean Askin. Thanks for joining us,

#### **Jeannette Campbell** 01:01

And hello and welcome to the show. From me. I'm Jeanette Campbell. Now for the conversation we're about to have in this episode, we're using the term newcomer broadly. I guess what we're really talking about here is what's known as the Canadian mosaic, the mix of cultures that shape the country, whether people are, indeed recent newcomers who are whether they're fourth generation born in Canada, descendants of parents who came here from another part of the world.

#### **Dean Askin** 01:28

Jeanette Statistics Canada put it this way in 2022 and I'm quoting here, immigrants to Canada make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years, and continue to shape who we are as Canadians.

#### **Jeannette Campbell** 01:43

You know, there was a time in this country when almost all immigration came from Europe. Nowadays, people are coming from countries and cultures from all over the world. Asia happens to be the continent where the most people are coming from, and India is the country where most immigrants to Canada were born.

**Dean Askin 02:03**

And naturally, as StatCan notes, and I'm quoting again here, immigrants come from many different countries, bringing with them their cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious heritage, and as we'll learn in this episode, their perceptions of disability. By the way, 27% of Canadians, 8 million people aged 15 and older across the Canadian Mosaic have a disability.

**Jeannette Campbell 02:30**

So just what is the perception of disability in the newcomer or immigrant communities and cultures? What are the challenges for people in these communities who have a disability, and how inclusive are they?

**Dean Askin 02:43**

These are some of the questions we're exploring in this episode as we wrap up our three part series on intersectionality and disability. If you missed part one, episode 28 about disability in the LGBTQ2s plus community, and Episode 29 disability in the First Nations and Inuit cultures. Be sure to check those out as well.

**Jeannette Campbell 03:06**

For this third and final part of the series, we're joined by two guests who whose work involves supporting people in the newcomer community who have a disability.

**Dean Askin 03:16**

Raihanna Hirji Khalfan is the National Director of Race and Disability Canada. Now these are just some of the highlights from her bio over 15 years of experience advancing disability rights, anti-racism and anti-oppressive practice in the non-profit and public sectors. She's a former Accessibility Officer for McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, whose expertise includes creating and managing programs for marginalized communities.

**Jeannette Campbell 03:43**

And Raihanna has two master's degrees, including one in critical disability studies.

**Dean Askin 03:49**

Also joining us is Rabia Khedr. She's the Chief Executive Officer of DEEN Support Services. DEEN, by the way, stands for Disability Empowerment Equality Network. It's a registered Canadian charity founded by Muslims who have a disability.

**Jeannette Campbell 04:04**

As the organization explains on its website, DEEN operates a number of programs and services in Mississauga, Ottawa and Scarborough, Ontario, and it serves all individuals with disability, regardless of religion, language and culture.

**Dean Askin 04:19**

The organization's mission is advancing community inclusion by offering culturally and spiritually relevant services for families and individuals living with disabilities.

**Jeannette Campbell 04:31**

So Rahainna and Rabia, welcome to You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. Thank you for joining us to share your insights and perspectives on this intersectionality of disability.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 04:43**

Thank you. It's lovely to be here. Thank you.

**Jeannette Campbell 04:48**

Okay, so you know what? Let's get right to it. I'm going to ask the first question, and Reanna, I'm wondering if you would maybe like to take the first response to it. It, and then we'll just let the conversation flow from there. So as we've said in this intro, we're really looking at what's the perception of or the attitude towards disability in the newcomer community. I mean, obviously there's going to be differences, there's going to be a range, or it'll depend on which culture or what part of the world newcomers are from. But just, I guess what we're trying to figure out is just how nuanced is it?

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 05:26**

So it's a really good question. And as you said, the newcomer community is a hugely diverse population, okay? And newcomer communities are not a monolith. There's a rich cultural, linguistic, religious, etc, etc, diversity that makes up those communities. So to answer that question is really, really hard, and I would say that the short answer is that it depends, right? Like every community, every culture, every racial background, have different perceptions and analysis around disability. Generally speaking, disability is a concept that is considered a normal part of people's lived experiences, right? And the nuances of how that operates and how that looks like really does depend on any any given community that you're working with. So we're actually at race and disability Canada, looking working on a new project called culture disability and inclusion, which is looking to do research in 10 global locations across the world to understand and actually answer this very question, like, what is disability and how is it considered and perceived by different communities across the world? And we're going to bring that research back to Canada and verify and kind of connect with local diaspora communities across the country to compare and contrast and say, you know, these communities in country X, you know, consider disability in this way. And how does that fare with what people in the local diaspora communities, you know, how do they perceive disability locally? So stay tuned for information about that. That project is going to conclude in March 2020, 2026, where we'll have a lot of resources and tools and materials that organizations across the country can access around specific communities and their cultural understandings of disability.

**Jeannette Campbell 07:10**

That sounds amazing, and we all know with the way that time is flowing right now, March 26 is really just around the corner, so that's really exciting. We will definitely stay tuned and stay in touch to get that information from you. So I guess Rabia, how what would you say about this?

**Rabia Khedr 07:30**

Again, I agree with Raihanna. People have different ways of knowing and being given their lived experience and the lived realities that they bring to their settlement process and their Canadian experience. So it's going to vary. It's going to be individual. It, you know, there are other elements like we can sort of have general understandings of how disability might be nuanced in a specific country or culture, but then, you know, socio economic status intersectionality plays out in different ways.

**Dean Askin 08:14**

I want to chime in and talk about similarities here for a minute, and I'll tell you what I mean. You know, I kind of mentioned this in the intro. And we started off this series with a conversation about disability in the LGBTQ 2s plus community. And the two researchers we talked to, they told us that they found that many people have a disability in that community are really struggling to fit into their community, into one that's already marginalized and discriminated, and yet there seems to be, you know, discrimination from the discriminated community against those in it who have a disability, and they found that, you know, there needs to be more inclusion and inclusive spaces within that community. Are there similarities around inclusion with the LGBTQ 2s plus community and the newcomer community?

**Rabia Khedr 09:08**

I think what you're what you're talking about is, you know what, as racialized people with disabilities, newcomers, we face barriers in the mainstream. We're discriminated because of our skin color, our other identity markers. Now for you know, Canadians with disabilities who are racialized or newcomers, we combat attitudes on multiple fronts, absolutely within our ethno specific communities, within our faith communities. We are disabled people that face discrimination due to our disability, whereas in the you know, and how that intersects with our gender identity, etc, in the dominant culture, you know, it's the whole package. It's not just our disability. So.

**Dean Askin 10:01**

Raihanna, what do you think?

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 10:03**

I was just going to say that, you know, all communities have a kind of similar construct, and that, you know, there's the majority, there's the kind of dominant values, dominant, you know, what we consider to be normal in inverted commas, and then you have people who are considered to be different and diverse. And in every community, there is ways in there are sites of inclusion and sites of exclusions. There's perceptions and beliefs that will have to be kind of unpacked and unraveled and reimaged. And I think that, you know, similar to your example of LGBTQ plus communities where they struggle with this, you know, issues in that community around disability inclusion, there were always going to be in every single community. However you define community, there'll be the same, there's a there'll be a replication of the same construct, right? And that we need to, you know, learn, unlearn, unlearn and relearn what inclusion actually looks like based on whatever issue. So any community, and however

you define that will, you will find a general perception about any given issue. And then there may be disruptions to how people perceive disability or inclusion, and that has to be learned and relearned. But I think that it's a similar thread, and I think it's, you know, every community, no matter what racial background, religious background, cultural, linguistic background or geographical background you come from, you'll have the same kind of cycle that is unfolding. But I think generally speaking, the the fact that we're having these conversations about the fact that we can have organizations like Dean, like race and disability Canada, is an indication that there is a lot of movement around disability, inclusion and accessibility within newcomer racialized communities. And I think that is, you know, a sign in and of itself, in terms of what inclusion looks like within ethno cultural communities.

**Jeannette Campbell 11:53**

And, you know, I guess going back sort of to Rabia is point about the concept of racialization, and then the concept of disability, and the layers that that creates when we talk about intersectionality and that there's, you know, there's going to be an ethno an ethno specific experience and and a type of discrimination that may be occurring. But then there's also what happens in as you described it, you know, the dominant culture. So that's where we see, like the the multiple layers, where the intersectionality really starts to come into play, and and you can keep adding and adding and adding to those layers, right? So you can be racialized, and you can be a newcomer, and you can be a woman, and you can be LGBTQ, and you can have a disability, and every time there's an and and, and that adds those layers to the challenges that people can be facing. So you know, for both of you, I guess we're looking to find out a little bit from you about what's your experience in supporting a newcomer community or racialized community, what are and what do you think are some of the biggest challenges, maybe, for newcomers who have a disability when they're when now?

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 13:13**

So I think, from my perspective, like coming from coming to it, from a race and disability Canada perspective, we really are looking at, you know, the structural, systemic, you know, means of exclusion that racialized people with disabilities and newcomers face, right? So, as you said, there is the experiences of racism that is systemic, that is ingrained into systems and policies and structures and and what have you. And then you have the addition of, you know, ableism attached to that. So I think supporting newcomer communities. I mean, I think there are two facets. You can unpack it in two ways. You can have like services and supports that are designed to support people at that intersection. But then you also need to have the advocacy and the addressing the systemic, the root causes of these systems in the first place, right? So, you know, at race and disability Canada, for example, out under our idea project, we are working to build the capacity of mainstream disability organizations to really understand these intersections, the specifically the intersections of race and disability. Because, if you can, and one of the things which I find very interesting is that we found in our research is that non racialized, disabled leaders have afraid to talk about race. And the reason why people are afraid to talk about race is because they don't know about race, right? You know, sometimes people are, you know, they're worried about being called out. They've had a bad experience previously. They don't want, they don't want, they don't want their good intentions, to be misinterpreted as racist. There are all these different layers, which means that people do not feel confident and they are not competent to speak about race. So as a disability sector leader, if I'm running an organization, and I have a position of power and authority to enact, you know, my diversity agenda, but if I, if I don't have. Of those basic

skills to talk about race in a meaningful way, I'm not going to be able to institute meaningful change on a systems level that will actually create a more inclusive either work environment or, you know, services or support services that I'm providing. So one of the biggest challenges, I would say, is working is acknowledging that this challenge exists in the first place. I think the conversation usually revolves around challenges within racialized or newcomer communities within like a cultural context. But I think the other part of the conversation must be around the dominant culture and the mainstream disability sector organizations and beyond, and what are they doing to kind of address the inherent racist ableism that exists? And I think that's a conversation that is often lacking, and what we're trying to do is provide those supportive learning environments through we have what we call the idea Community of Practice, where we have disability sector leaders join together online, on a virtual learning network, where we kind of, we work with them, right? We meet people where they're at and we're talking with them about, to be honest, quite basic concepts, what is race, what is racialization, what is marginalization, what is colonization, and what do all these things have to do with disability, right? So one of the things that we try and talk about is colonization and the impact that's had on indigenous people with disabilities, the legacy of enslavement and the reality of anti black racism, and the impact that has on black communities, the reality and the history of immigration law and policy and how law and policy has been used to systematically exclude racialized people with disabilities. So once you look at that History of Disability oppression in Canada, you can kind of come to you can kind of look at the context now of newcomers, of racialized people with disabilities, and kind of see this in context. And I think having those type of conversations in a way that is accessible, that is welcoming, that kind of invites people to engage with these almost quite difficult concepts for people to grapple with, if they've not, you know, have this type of background, I think is really, really important, and that's a key challenge that we're trying to address with the work that we're doing at race and disability Canada.

**Jeannette Campbell 17:18**

Thank you for that. That's I think there's a lot in there that we could put could probably spend time unpacking as well. But, you know, it is. It's taking into account all of these different things that are actually impacting a person's experience, a person's day to day interactions in their communities and in their workplaces. Go ahead.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 17:41**

So I just wanted to add to that we have actually something called the idea practitioners and Professionals Network. So the CEO the communities of practice, we have our cohort now, but in terms of the idea practitioners and Professionals Network, that is a network that is open for member, for people to apply to be a member. So that kind of folk targets, you know, your dei workers in disability organizations and beyond who are tasked with the diversity portfolio. You know, oftentimes, I kind of joke about this saying you have kind of middle, middle managers working within institutions tasked with systems wide change in terms of, like, you know, how do we reform our organization to be more inclusive, but this particular these, this particular role, doesn't have kind of power authority to actually make systems wide change. It's kind of interesting, but that these, these workers, or these management level staff, are really uniquely placed, and they have a level of expertise, but they're often the lone voice. So this network that we've created is to kind of connect and connect those individual workers across the sector, to kind of talk to each other. Network, share strategies, share challenges and opportunities for for collaboration. So that's a network that I think that your listeners would really



appreciate, in terms of, if they have, if they hold the diversity portfolio in their organization, they're more than welcome to to join that membership. And we have really great networking sessions every month where, you know, staff, can get together and chat about these issues around idea, the challenges and what are the opportunities to kind of address this particular issue.

**Jeannette Campbell 19:15**

I think what would be great is if we can get that information from you, and then dean, maybe we can add a link to that to the show notes, so that people will and even for Odin, I think that that's a great resource for us to have when we are out communicating with that those employee resource groups, and a lot of our conversations are with those leads in Dei, and they're coming to us to get that awareness and confidence around disability, but there they are looking at everything. So this is another resource we could offer them as well. So that's great. So So Rabia at DEEN, not Dean, but it not our, not our co host,

**Dean Askin 19:57**

Sounds the same but spelled differently. Yeah.

**Jeannette Campbell 20:00**

Exactly at DEEN you your organization does do some direct service delivery for for people who have a disability related to employment. So from your perspective, what are, what are some of the biggest challenges that you're seeing for maybe racialized population, newcomer populations who have a disability in relation to employment.

**Rabia Khedr 20:28**

Again, it's the it's the intersectional experience, it's the layers of discrimination to get their foot in the door. We provide a number of services. We're a very unique organization in that we're sort of a hub of service. So we our flagship program is a life skills program for folks with intellectual disabilities, and then we have peer networks and run educational sessions, information and referrals. Employment is an aspiration of almost everyone we serve. Everybody wants to work, participate in employment opportunities. They want to get and keep a job, and many a times, they find themselves not only discriminated because of their disability, but because of their whole identity, their whole package, their race and disability, their language barriers, their accents, their names. You know, they face the same as people with disabilities, who are newcomers, who are racialized. They face the same barriers that people without disabilities who are newcomers or racialized experience with the added layer of discrimination or the compound effect of the disability as well. So again, supports and services out there don't necessarily recognize that intersectional experience, and don't necessarily have a way to respond to it, to support people in successfully getting and keeping a job.

**Dean Askin 22:15**

You know, you've kind of answered the question I wanted to ask, but I want to, I want to draw it out a little bit more. And you know, the employment rate of people who have a disability in this country, it's up, but the equitable employment journey is still fraught with barriers for anyone who has a disability. I mean, so how magnified are those barriers in the newcomer community?

**Rabia Khedr 22:38**

They're huge. They're probably, I don't know that we have statistical data per se, but I think there would be a disproportionate amount of disabled people unemployed who are racialized, as opposed to the broader stat. So we need to segregated data around this. There isn't adequate data through staff scan to break it really down. Rehana, I don't know if you have specific numbers, but I think we need more data.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 23:09**

No, we don't have specific numbers that I can recall right now, but we to your point, yeah, we absolutely, absolutely need more research in this area. But I think that anecdotally, we know that, for example, you know, there's this thing called name bias, right? So if I've put my my name on a you know, application, you know, that gives people a hint of my race, my ethnicity, my place of origin, all that fun stuff. And you know, depending on who's reading the application, that may or may not favor Well, what work in my favor or not? There's also, you know, the intersections of race and disability in terms of, you know, being in the workplace and being able to gain meaningful employment and retain meaningful employment is really an interesting area that really needs to be looked at further right. So we've, we've done research before where people have said that, you know, senior members of staff who've worked in even the DEI field have said to us that there's no way I'm going to disclose my disability or my need for an accommodation to my employer, because they don't really they, you know, in one example, this person said they don't know that I'm actually racialized, like they I'm white passing, and they don't know that I'm Arab and so, but I know that because they think I'm white, they have said things in my presence that are deeply racist, and because they they think I don't have a disability, they've also said things that are deeply ableist. So I'm not about to out myself in terms of my the intersections of my race and disability. In a similar example, someone had said that, you know, by disclosing, even though theoretically they realize that, you know, it's inherent right to be able to access accommodations based on, you know, your disability, that all that would do was reinforce a stereotype that people from their particular cultural background are lazy or don't have a strong work ethic, and that's why they need, you know, time off or time. Break in middle of the work day. So there is this really nuanced ways in which the intersection of ableism and racism come out in an employment context that really needs to be unpacked. But to wrap your original point, we need data, and we've done a little bit of work here and there, but it really needs to be flushed out in more detail, to be able to back up what the what we know to be true in terms of, in terms of people's individual stories, we need hard data at this point to be able to, you know, support and evidence of the claims that we're making, which we know today, of course,

**Dean Askin 25:37**

And you're right there. There really is a lack of data, you know, as a, you know, as a writer and a communicator, when I'm researching for, you know, blog posts or articles, there's there, let's just say there's not a plethora of data on disability and in Canada and and, you know, and you're right, you know, the stats show that very few people really disclose a disability, I think it's something like only 4% of, you know, people in the C suite disclose. And there was the one global study done last year that a company said they think 7% of their employees have a disability, but it's actually closer to 25% because people aren't aren't disclosing. So I mean, there's all kinds of challenges for the people who have a disability, and we've talked about that. So in addition to their challenges, I want to get a sense from



each of you know, what are your challenges? What are the challenges of supporting newcomers who have a disability? I mean, how difficult is your job?

**Rabia Khedr 26:40**

Well, again, there's a need. You know, people bring their lived experience, right? I My family and I brought our lived experience to this country. I came here at the age of four, and my parents lived experience was that of exclusion when it comes to vision loss. So I'm blind, and I had, you know, my eye condition was visible from birth. I could see somewhat, but not enough. I had an uncle with the same vision loss, and the his experience was that he attended school in the village where I was born. There was no, you know, electricity at that time, there was the old fashioned state, you know, slate and stylist and little mini chalkboards and chalk that people used to use. So it wasn't even paper and pen at that time. And he, he struggled his way through to grade five. The eye condition I have is Leber's congenital eyerosis. So the vision deteriorates over time, and you know, light and dark makes a difference, so he was struggling by the time grade five came about, my grandmother was summoned by the headmaster to the school ie principal and told take him home because his vision is going to get worse. And she took him home, kicking and screaming and crying. And that was a very traumatic experience that my, you know, father and my mother recall, because my mother and father, you know, were in the same you know, grew up there as well with him, and so they brought that lived experience. Their first thing to take me to when they landed here was to sick kids, hospital, to the eye clinic, to the best eye doctors possible. They didn't think of school, and nor did the hospital ask them if I was in school? I sat at home for about four years watching television and lots of it, and learning the language and learning how to count and and say my alphabet and all that kind of wonderful stuff. And one day somebody said to my dad, Oh, is she? What grade is she? And, you know, somehow figured out I wasn't in school. This was a friend of my dad said. He said, Wait a minute, this is Canada. You need to take her to school. So I was taken to a local school, but I was mislabeled and misplaced because of the way my father communicated my vision loss, as opposed to the way the system needed to hear it. My father said she has poor eyesight and wears glasses, and I struggled with an assessment. And the experts, the psycho Educational Consultants, thought, oh well, she must have a learning disability. They didn't think I had vision loss significant enough to, you know, make me perform poorly on those tasks. So newcomers, I think the experience is complex. They bring that lived reality with them of back home in migration that doesn't just get left behind. They have to learn how to navigate the system here, they have to learn how. To reconcile their lived experience with the Canadian context around disability, and they have to, you know, figure out how to make their way. It's it's complicated.

**Dean Askin 30:14**

So it sounds like, you know, does being able to or how does drawing on your own lived experience with disability, how does that help you do your job to support you know others in your in in the newcomer community, it says, I mean, often, I guess relationship building is a big part of it does being able to draw on your own lived experience help build the relationships that help you. Help you confidently. Support people,

**Rabia Khedr 30:44**

Absolutely Dean. At DEEN Support Services, it's all about the fact that there's nothing about us without us. Our board of directors members are from diverse backgrounds, ethno racial, cultural backgrounds,

language backgrounds. They either are individuals with disabilities themselves or family members of individuals with disabilities. Our senior leadership team identify as racialized people with disabilities. We employ as much as possible people with disabilities, we've fostered a safe environment for disclosure and and accommodation. In that regard, people feel connected and reflected when they enter into our environment because we share, you know, cultural and spiritual values and traditions. We operate from a human rights lens. We serve everybody that we can, that comes through our doors, as long as we can meet their support needs. But we operate, like I said, from that cultural and spiritual lens as a Muslim organization established by Muslims and primarily funded by the Muslim community, just like Rena services, which was established by the Jewish community, like Mary center, established by the Catholic community, We operate within, you know, certain values and traditions, but we serve everyone that we can, and we uniquely understand and appreciate their circumstances, and we reflect their their values and their beliefs and their day to Day traditions. In what happens within our space people feel safe. It is about relationships. It is about not having to constantly educate people about your values and expectations because you have this shared experience.

**Dean Askin 32:58**

Raihanna, I want to get your perspective. How challenging is your job.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 33:03**

In many ways, it is. But I think that's just the not the nature of not, you know, just running an organization, but in terms of the specifics, I wanted to kind of reiterate what Ravi I said. So Rob is actually one of the one of is the founder of race and disability Canada, and the other founders are equally like other racialized people with disabilities who've been advocating around these intersections for decades as an organization, we prioritize hiring, or we place a lot of value on the lived experiences of indigenous, black, racial people with disabilities, and we we, you know, into thinking about like, how do you enact systems, processes and policies that are actually truly inclusive, right looking at Our recruitment methodology. And, you know, how do we weight certain experiences and histories in terms of, like, qualifications and competencies? Is something that we, you know, try make a particular effort to do. But in terms of, one of my challenges is, like, how do we operationalize inclusion? Like, how do you operationalize, you know, processes and systems that, you know, appreciate people's lived experiences into rabiah point, you know, how do we Yeah? One of my major challenges recently is thinking about, yeah. How do I operationalize, how do I institutionalize inclusion in a way that takes into account people's lived experiences of racialization and racism, their lived experiences around disability and disablement and ableism. And how do you, you know, create a truly inclusive organization and an accessible organization recognizing that people with disabilities experience, you know, barriers on a day to day basis. So how do you create an organization that is responsive to the specific needs of staff, as well as being able to deliver and meet timelines as per whatever is that you're supposed to do as an organization. So I think really being mindful, taking like a holistic approach and recognizing that people come to the table, people come to your work, to any workplace, with a whole lot of lived experience that can be very, very valuable. Ball to your work and sometimes can be quite challenging in terms of, you know, the day to day experiences. So how do we just recognize that one of the things that I try and do with my team is I invite people to talk about, you know, their faith, their culture, use particular language that may be, you know, common to particular cultural context and linguistic context, because recognizing that, you know, people use particular verbiage in their everyday in their everyday

interactions with people, is a way that you recognize and appreciate inclusion, right? Like, I think one of the things that we've we've been speaking about in the communities of practice, is about, you know, whose values and whose culture is seen as normal, and whose cultures and whose values and whose ways of being is considered a little bit on the periphery. And we really want to try and bring things and perceptions, values, beliefs and perspectives that are typically on the margin and bring them to the center. And we try and do that in different ways, through conversation and informal things. But again, going back to my original point, to ask you a question, operationalizing inclusion is really, really important. I believe it's about being intentional, being deliberate, really unpacking what is considered professionalism, and really kind of honing in on, like the big picture in terms of what we what we're here to do. Why are we here? And for me, the process is just as important as the outcome. So as an organization, of course, we have deliverables, we have timelines, we have outputs that we need to deliver, but the way in which we do that, you know, is really, really important. And for me as an organizational leader, it's like, how do we again operationalize inclusion and accessibility in the way that is responsive to the lived realities of people who are has experienced racist ableism for pretty much most of their lives.

**Jeannette Campbell 36:49**

And I guess, you know, looking at this question, almost from the from the opposite way, what? What would the both of you say is some of the most rewarding parts of what you're doing, and I guess really is, have you seen in your time changes happening or improvements, or are there, are there things that are signaling to you that that people are under starting to understand more about this intersectionality and really understanding, you know, as you said, the intersection between ableism and racism, have you, you know, is there, is there any progress or reward that you've seen so far?

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 37:30**

For me, I have staff who have told me that, you know what, I feel it's like working at racism break hands, like coming home, and I was like, expectin that type of, you know, commentary or feedback, but it really resonated. And when we do different exercises in our team meetings, it's like the general the general feeling is a sense of comfort and belonging. And for me, that type of feedback is critical and important. But you know, when we've engaged with indigenous, black, racialized people with disabilities, and we've had a round table. And one of the things that stuck out for me is one person said, I really feel seen and heard. And I'll be honest, we just had a call. It was literally from my perspective, just, you know, organized a round table, we had a conversation talking about, you know, various issues. That type of feedback for me is, you know that will motivate me for the next 10 years, because to be able to do something that enable people to feel that they've been seen and heard is critically important to the work that we do. And you know, in our cops and in our other programs, you know, we have disability sector leaders equally, who say, I'm so glad that I have a place that I can ask my questions. I'm so glad that I can. I'm in a place where I could talk about these issues, right, where we say to them, we see that there's hesitation when you're using the word race or racialization. You know, let's unpack that a little bit and let us help you and to get feedback from our participants, disability sector leaders, who've been doing this work for decades, who are able to kind of leave those forums and feel a little bit more confident talking about the intersections of race and disabilities. That, to me, is, you know, very, very rewarding, and tells us that we're on the right track. We have a lot of work to do. We've barely touched the surface, but you know, for me, it's like we are. We're on the right track, and

I'm really, really excited about the work that we can do at race and race and disability Canada, and the initiatives that we're doing and really continuing to engage the diversity of the various communities that we're trying to work with.

**Jeannette Campbell** 39:33

And Rabia, what about what about you?

**Rabia Khedr** 39:36

What's rewarding to me is putting the issue on the map. You know, for for so many years, I've been working in this space since the 90s, and, you know, our roots are with erdco, ethno racial people with disabilities, Coalition of Ontario. And erdco was a lone ranger, and nobody was really listening. Everybody jumped on the inclusion Ben. Inclusion only from the perspective of disability and not that intersectional reality of Canadians with disabilities. And over time, you know, there's been little splinterings of efforts here and there, meanwhile, as grassroots communities, all the partners that came together under race and disability Canada, we did our part with very limited resources to empower racialized people with disabilities. In recent years, especially post pandemic, we recognize that there's more attention being paid to this, it's not just, you know, we have extra pocket change, so let's do it, you know, diversity and inclusion workshop, but it's really, what can we do to bring about some systemic change? So that, to me, is like, whoa, hello. I've been doing this for 30 years. I've been talking about this for so long, it's about time that somebody's listening. It's nothing new. It's not magic. Guys, you know. So for me, it's that Hello moment, if I can say that. And also, you know again, just finding those connections, making those connections, bringing that conversation around racialized people with disabilities, newcomers with disabilities, forward into the National Disability space has been very important to me, and seeing that, you know, it's resonating. And there are others in that space, like meeting folks through Canadian Council on Disability, like Heather walk us and Ingrid Palmer has been very exciting for me that, you know, we're at this brink of bringing about some substantive change. A lot of work ahead, but it's, it's in reach now, the work that needs to be done is in reach

**Dean Askin** 42:22

Absolutely, you know, my, my, my brain is raising and my head is spinning, because there's just so much to understand about all the many nuances and all the different angles of intersectionality disability, you know, within the racialized and newcomer community. So can we nail it down, you know, to one thing. I mean, what would you say is the main thing that people from outside the newcomer community really need to understand? I guess I'm talking about people, whether they have a disability or whether they don't. What's the main thing? What do they need to understand most about this intersectionality of disability.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan** 43:05

So I would say we just launched our the big, the first of our idea toolkits, and that first toolkit is about courageous conversations. And I would to answer your question, I would say it's about having courageous conversations, because courageous conversations about race, courageous conversations about disability, and courageous conversation about every, you know, everything surrounded surrounding those intersections. And if you go to our website, you'll be able to see that first toolkit. And I'm sure by the time this episode is there'll be many more on the site for people to look at. But I, for me,

I think it's about, it's about, you know, leaning into the discomfort and having those conversations and connecting with communities, with organizations, with leaders like Heather and Ingrid and Rabia, who have been leading this charge for decades, and really, you know, figuring out your role in place in this in this change that is inevitably Have happening.

**Dean Askin** 44:00

Rabia, what about you?

**Rabia Khedr** 44:01

For me, my message would be, don't be threatened. Be be open to the inclusion of racialized people with disabilities.

**Jeannette Campbell** 44:15

Yeah, and I guess that that concept of, don't be frightened and be open. You know, I think that's been some of the underlying conversation here is around in recent in this conversation around that education, educate yourself, become aware. You know, it openly say we call our training disability awareness and confidence training. And we specifically say that, because we say if you're not aware of something, you can't be confident in it. And we know that when we work with with organizations and businesses or government, that there's a lot of a lot of common themes here around some of the challenges in the and it does go back to. You know, Reanna your point about courageous conversations, and which, again, is, you know, to Robbie's point, don't be, you know, just, just do it. Don't be afraid. And I think that that's, I think that that's so important so, you know, that's sort of, what are some of the things that people you know need to understand the most, and definitely this toolkit will make sure that, you know, we'll connect with you and see if there's the ability to get that linked as well. And I know for my team and my organization, we're going to be downloading the toolkit and looking at it because we need to continuously educate ourselves as well and make ourselves aware so for for everybody who's taking in this conversation right now, as we sort of draw to a close, what's if there was a single most important thing that you want them to take away, like maybe a bit of a call to action or anything like that, What would what would that be? I think

**Rabia Khedr** 46:02

For me, and I've been having this conversation today, training a bunch of folks in Nova Scotia, in within the system, is recognize your power and privilege and be prepared to share it. Don't be threatened. Be prepared to share power, because that's what helps us build an inclusive community, an inclusive society and an inclusive workplace. And

**Raihna Hirji-Khalfan** 46:34

I would echo that absolutely and that, you know, inclusion is for everybody. It's not just for the a small handful of people that we have selected, right? I think that is the key point. Yeah,

**Dean Askin** 46:45

Before we draw this conversation to a close, I have to ask the, you know, the question I've been asking as the final question for what, five seasons now, on this on this podcast, you've both had such great

insights on all this, and we've talked about so much. Is there anything we haven't talked about on this that you think is important to mention as a final word?

**Rabia Khedr 47:12**

I'm speechless, and that doesn't often happen. I don't know. I that

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 47:23**

I was going to say something in that, you know, at the beginning, in the intro, you'd mentioned about the history of newcomers. And for me, when we're thinking about newcomers, I think it's really, really important to recognize the history of settler colonialism and the fact that, you know, we are a nation that was founded on, you know, the colonization of indigenous people. And I think that history is so critical in terms of when we're talking about indigenous, black, racialized people with disabilities. And because the history is not benign, it is very it is the source of the of exclusion. You know, it's the founding story of our nation in many ways, like it is the founding stories of our nation, and it has a very specific and strong line to the situation of racialized people with disabilities in Canada today. So I think understanding the history of disability oppression as it relates to indigenous, black, racialized people with disabilities, the legacy of colonization, the legacy of slavery in Canada, enslavement in Canada, and the legacy of discriminatory immigration law and policy is critical to this conversation. We cannot talk about inclusion. We cannot talk about diversity without recognizing our history, and

**Rabia Khedr 48:42**

that's something really important that Raihanna brings up absolutely and she's, you know, triggered a thought in me to say that it's not just about newcomers, because newcomers aren't necessarily racialized, right? It's really about racialized, indigenous and black communities who have been here, you know, as indigenous folks forever, and black and racialized people over many, many generations and if not centuries. And it's really recognizing that there is huge history of exclusion around that intersectionality that it's not a new phenomenon, although it's a new buzz term that everybody's paying attention to, and that today racialized people with disabilities face a whole, you know, compounded experience of barriers, as do our indigenous brothers and sisters with disabilities, who have been here forever. They are not new, then they can't be lumped into newcomers, but they have this intersectional experience of exclusion. Not only because of their disability, but because of their indigenous origins.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan 50:06**

And I would also just like to add, and I I actually should have said this somewhere earlier in the conversation, however, you know, I think one of the we're talking about newcomers and people with newcomers with disabilities. I think one of the the things that often doesn't get talked about, along with the history of disability, along with the history of disability oppression, is the causes of disablement. You know, across the world, we know that war and violence is is one of the major causes of disablement. And I cannot talk about disability rights and intersectionality and indigenous, black, racialized people with disabilities, and not make mention of the current genocide that is happening in Palestine today and the level of disablement that is happening, you know, I think that there is, you know, the UN Convention on the right, the UN Committee on the Rights of people with disabilities have clearly stated their concerns around accessibility in, you know, in the context of the genocide and the situation of people with disabilities in Gaza in particular, and it's, you know, a significant cause for concern doesn't even



cut it at this point. But again, the you know, the conversation around disablement, the conversation around people with disabilities from Palestine is, you know, that conversation is a tricky conversation to have for many people, because it's nuanced and it's layered and it's ingrained with issues of racism and settler colonialism, and these are, again, histories and facts that we often shy away from talking about because for many, many different reasons. But I think if we want to hone in on disability and racism, this is a really good example of that intersection as it relates to newcomer communities, the treatment of people who have become disabled through war and genocide, and the response that we have as a country and as a world at this point to the situation that is currently unfolding. And then I hope, by the time that we this particular episode is aired, that this is actually a point of history as a point of a point of current current affairs.

**Rabia Khedr 52:12**

And this is the added piece around newcomers with disabilities that we didn't even scratch the surface on people who are newcomers with disabilities coming through the experience of torture and trauma and acquired disability as a result of war, and what that means, and how do we serve them and ensure their full language?

**Jeannette Campbell 52:36**

Yeah, because that is that's a it's when, when you bring in that, that part of the conversation it is, that's a whole other conversation. And I think it's a place where, at least, in my opinion, for Canada, I think it's an area that hasn't been an area of focus, and so there isn't a lot of the supports in place to really help people as they're coming into Canada, coming out of these experiences and away from these experiences, whether they had a disability or it was acquired, they're still coming with that traumatization, with all of those other things that have happened to them and that they've experienced or witnessed and then finding themselves here in a country that isn't necessarily prepared to be dealing with all of these things at once. So it's hopeful that you know, through organizations like yours, through conversations like this, that that does spark that that conversation, or that it supports, you know, the continuing of these conversations, because that is a huge piece of it that you know our experience is showing us. When I say our experience, I mean at Odin in talking with our service providers that are in our network, you know, some of the challenges that they were facing supporting refugees who were coming through from the Ukraine just a little while ago and making sure that there were, you know, so we're going back maybe about a year or so ago, or two years, when there was really a big push of refugees coming into the country and the disabilities that were being acquired, Especially ones around sensory disabilities and so not being prepared in Canada, around our ASL for supporting the deaf community by people who are being deafened through acts of war, and not necessarily having enough translators who were fluent in the languages that they needed to be fluent in. So even that was just like a tiny example of the large issue that the both of you are touching on. So you know, thank you for that. And I think maybe that's something Dean and I can go back and start thinking about for for season six, having having that conversation and and calling on both of you maybe to help us to frame that conversation. Conversation and start it. Yeah, that would be, that would be great. And so, you know, I feel like we could talk. We could talk forever on this we could so at this point, I don't want to stop the conversation, but I know that we have to. So I'm going to say thank you to both of you for for this great conversation, and, you know, sort of two personal insights. One is being the only Canadian born in my family. So my parents emigrated here in the 60s. Had this Canada was my

mother's third country. My mother is racialized. I am one of those people who people would not necessarily identify as being somebody who is biracial, but I do most definitely identify myself that way. And so it was very interesting, Rana, when you were talking about some people's experiences about being inside conversations that wouldn't have happened had people understood my identity, and thinking about that history piece around, what are the, what are the challenges that are layered on to people who are racialized? And I think about my mother's experience in this country, in the in the 60s and and what, what that was like for her. And then, you know, Rabia, I remember that Dean and I first met you last January at University of Toronto, Scarborough campus.

**Rabia Khedr** 56:28

Yep, David Onley event, yep,

**Jeannette Campbell** 56:30

Exactly for the Fonds exhibit those archives. So I gotta say we were so glad that we met you at that event, and that that's how we were able to reach out to you for this episode. Yes, you connected us with rayanna. And so I have to say it again, thank you. It has been a great conversation. And you know, I just thank you both for coming in and helping us and everyone and anyone who's tuning into this episode right now to really start to think about all of the nuances of disability and the and the impacts of of the different cultures that make up the Canadian mosaic and everybody's individual experience.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan** 57:12

Thank you so much. Thank you. Love the conversation, and I hope to continue talking.

**Rabia Khedr** 57:16

Yeah, looking forward to getting the link to the final podcast.

**Dean Askin** 57:21

I have to say thanks to both of you as well. And you know, Jeannette, I remember, you know, meeting Rabia at that U of T Scarborough Campus event as well. And I remember that evening I was just feeling so awkward, because I'm just awkward when it comes to making conversation at events like that. And I think I mentioned the time that we were doing this episode, and my journalistic spidey sense was going off that evening, and it tingled, and I knew right then and there that I was going to be getting in touch with Rabia to get to come on the show. So I want to say thanks again, Rabia for agreeing to be part of this conversation when I reached out afterwards. You know, as Jeanette said, this has been a great conversation and a really important one to have, I think for me, you know, as someone whose descendants come from England and Ireland, that's my heritage, I think I can say I've come out of this conversation with a better understanding about the nuances of disability in different cultures. And hopefully everyone taking in this episode has too, you know, maybe the conversation that all of us have had on this intersectionality disability will spark other conversation, and both inside and outside, the newcomer immigrant communities and cultures.

**Jeannette Campbell** 58:32

Yeah, I love, I love the thought of that and and I think that this is actually a great season closer that we know now has sparked other conversations. So I guess that that is a wrap for our three part series on

intersectionality, and this is actually a wrap to our fifth podcast season. So before we go, I do just want to say thank you to my co host who's really nurtured me. Over the last five seasons, I've learned a lot from you, Dean and and I have had the opportunity, because of that, to learn a lot from all of the guests who've been on our show. So this has been a real pleasure working on this passion project, and for everybody who ever has been a guest, including the two of you as our last guest for this season. Thank you so much.

**Raihanna Hirji-Khalfan** 59:22

Thank you.

**Dean Askin** 59:24

Well, you know, inside right now I'm going like, ah, shocks, you know, because thanks for that, Jeanette, you know, because, I mean, I'm just doing my thing. I mean, it's, it's hard to believe now that we've been doing the show together for five years. You remember when it used to take us, like, over an hour or so to do the run through for an episode, and now we whip through it easily and in half the time. I mean, I guess that in itself says a lot,

**Jeannette Campbell** 59:46

And so it does Dean and so I'm Jeanette Campbell, and thanks for being with us this episode and this season, and we'll be back next season with more great conversations like this one, and we're hoping that you'll tune in again in 20. 25 for new episodes, and in the meantime, I hope you'll take in all the existing episodes of you can't spell inclusion without a D. You know, a minute ago, Robbie and I mentioned David Onley. So for anyone who's not familiar with that name, David C only was the first working television journalist in Canada and the First Lieutenant Governor of Ontario who had a visible disability, and we just had a really moving conversation about his legacy of championing disability inclusion and accessibility in Episode 27 and you know, also just draw to people's attention, maybe check out Episode Two. I mean, check them all out, but maybe check out Episode Two while you're waiting for the new season to come out. And that's that's from our very first season, and that's our most downloaded podcast ever.

**Dean Askin** 1:00:50

And Jeanette, you know, I guess since it's the second half of November, as this episode's airing and our podcast season is ending, just as the holiday season is upon us, we should sign off by saying Happy Holidays and Happy New Year. Catch you in spring 2025 for season six, I'm Dean Askin. 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 about disability in the newcomer community and explore disability and 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 Jeanette 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@odennetwork.com](mailto:info@odennetwork.com) that's info at 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

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