

SAME SAME BUT DIFFERENT TRANSCRIPT
Live Panel Discussion
Wollongong City Library
18 June 2019

MUSIC

Jenny Thompson - Manager Libraries and Community Services, Wollongong City Council.

Hello and welcome, I'm Jenny Thompson, the Manager of Libraries and Community Services at Wollongong City Council.

During Pride week Wollongong Library hosted a lively panel discussion called *Same Same But Different* which invited people living with a disability, parents and community service providers and members of Wollongong's LGBTQI community to share their lived experiences.

It may seem to the outside observer that these two seemingly disparate communities don't share much in common - besides being diverse minority groups - but what happens when the two intersect? Same Same... But Different?

Jacqui Gilday was the host for the evening and asked all the awkward questions around dating, identity, family dynamics, mental health and prejudice.

And answering all the awkward questions with their frank and sometimes funny stories were our community panel; Bronson Lloyd, Tanya Mc Gee, Penelope Desmazures, Topia Ryan-Jones and Sam Noonan.

CLAPPING

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Hello

MUSIC ENDS

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Hi, so a little bit about me before we start. So, I'm Jacqui Gilday. I come from the UK, hence the strange accent. So, I come from Brighton, described it to the gayest place, in the UK, possibly Europe. And for me, I was born with a cleft lip and palate. I also had extreme asymmetry. You can't tell because I've had lots of operations throughout my time. Um, I went into special educational teaching and then from there I've got three, three boys, lovely boys, one of which identifies as ASD. Uh, I've worked in disability for many, many years and I'm now working for a company called Stretch-A-Family up in the inner west. We're an inner west out of home care, so

it's not specifically disabilities, but we support, uh, teenagers who live in residential homes who maybe are, we have quite a few that have different types of disabilities, but also being the inner west we're the most, we have the most children who are experiencing that kind of time when they're not sure what's going on and they're having those kinds of hard questions. They're exploring their sexuality, they're exploring their gender.

Now before we start, just so that we can add to the flow, I'd like to ask if it's ok if we can use the term D S G (Diverse Sexuality and Gender) instead of the long L B G T Q (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer) acronym. So that starts for Diverse Sexuality and Gender. If anybody doesn't like to use that, it just means that we're going to be moving a bit, it kind of breaks the flow when we have to stop and do that. So, if everybody's okay, I think we'll start.

So, we're going to introduce all of the people on our lovely panel. They've all got their microphones. So, we can start this end. If you'd like to give us a little bit about yourself, Sam up at this end.

Sam Noonan

Ok, so I'm Sam Noonan. I was born legally blind. My husband is also legally blind. I have a 16-year old lesbian daughter. She and her partner, um, they've been together 15 months, which is pretty awesome for a kid that young. Um, they both live at home with us and possibly want to get married one day. They're a little young just yet, but we'll see. (laughing) Um, I have an older daughter who has had some mental health challenges and she has two small children, one of whom possibly this, she's still undergoing genetic testing. She definitely has a form of dwarfism and it's possibly primordial, which is proportional. So, she's very, very tiny. But everything is in proportion. I worked as a Braille music transcriber and proofreader for Vision Australia in Sydney for 19 years. Then I decided to go into business for myself, so I run just a little one-person company called Deal In Dots. So, I'm a, um, Braille transcriber of, of.... Sheeba. What are you doing? Having a scratch. Ok, yep. This is Sheeba my Guide Dog who wants to get in on the show. So, yeah I'm a Braille transcriber and proofreader. I'm also really willing to teach anyone Braille if they're interested or if anyone knows of anybody who might need some help with Braille. I think that's about it.

Topia Ryan-Jones

Uh, so my name is Topia. Uh, I was born legally blind as well. I also have a younger brother who is legally blind but with a different and almost opposite eye condition. Uh, I have tunnel vision and night blindness. So, I have about five degrees of vision in my right eye. Uh, and I identify as gay. I'm a stand-up comedian in Wollongong. I'm currently studying my Postgrad certificate in health promotion at, at UOW (University of Wollongong). I use a long cane and don't have a gorgeous dog unfortunately.

Penelope Desmazes

Hi, I'm Pen Desmazes. I um, am sort of a fraud on the panel. I don't have a disability, um, that I identify, I have lots of issues in life, but nothing really worth talking about. But I have worked in the disability sector for 28 years now. I identify as gay and am here on behalf of service providers part, partly to comment on where we're at but also to hear from other people about where we can improve and what we can do.

Tanya McGee

Hi, I'm Tanya. Umm, oh god, now I'm nervous. My youngest is 19 and is quite autistic. Her mental age is about of a three-year old. I don't know whether she identifies herself as gay or not, but it's quite interesting that she gravitates towards other girls and not boys. I have a 22-year old who started the process of trans-gendering from female to male and that's been an interesting process as a parent. Um, totally accepting, totally love this child for who they are, not what they are. I met my same sex partner about a year and a half ago. Previously, before that I was married, um, long-term relationships with men and I'm currently in love with a female.

Bronson Lloyd

I'm Bronson. I am a trans man, umm Gay Trans Man. I'm on the Autistic spectrum. I pretty much like volunteer at Headspace and for Aspect and yeah.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Brilliant. Well thank you. I actually forgot that I identify as gay as well. Due to have the biggest gay wedding in this country ever in three weeks. So, um, I forgot to explain that. So I think what we'll start with is we will start by discussing if, maybe potentially if having a disability, you think that and being diverse, sexuality or gender, whether that affects your dating? Does anybody on the panel have any experiences? Anything to share about their experiences dating?

Bronson Lloyd

It sucks.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

It sucks? Ohhhhhh. In which way?

Bronson Lloyd

Um, just because like being trans, it makes it different, (inaudible) to people day to day. Then I have to come and tell people I'm trans, which people are assholes at the best of times, let alone telling people, then them assuming that, oh, I have a penis. Never going to happen.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you. And I can understand that that would be, you know, difficult. It's like layers and layers and layers of like disclosing things. So that's kind of always opening yourself up, you know like, and you must have those worries about you know, what people are gonna think, what they're going to feel and whether you're going to be rejected. Is that, and it must be a hard thing for you.

Bronson Lloyd

Yes.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Yes. Laughing.. Thank you. Anybody else have any kind of dating experiences or troubles even if it is, you know, difficult. Any good experiences?

Topia Ryan-Jones

I feel, yeah, the, the point of disclosure is an interesting thing because I don't always use a cane in the daytime, um in familiar places. So, like it comes to a point where, you have to decide, if you don't tell them first, when are you going to tell it? Like is it going to be the first time, like, I run into a wall or like when is, when is that point going to be? Yeah. Most, most people seem to be really good, really good about it now, that I've come across, you get some dickheads but you just don't date them, like just.. It's a deal breaker if they're not understanding, I guess. It can be hard sometimes that, you know, probably harder before you tell them because you fear, it's like coming out. Like you fear what they going to say more than what they actually say. I think.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Have there ever been any times when you've been surprised by what someone said in a positive way? If you kind of..

Topia Ryan-Jones

Um, I think the best reaction is just ambivalence. They're just like, yeah, cool, what do you want for lunch? Like that, that's the most positive reaction I feel. Yeah.

Penelope Desmazes

Just a comment, leading on from what Topia just said about that fear of outing yourself. And I think for a lot of people with disabilities who have a obvious physic, obviously visual disability that people can see that they don't have to announce that side of thing, but it's the, the gay, lesbian, DSG (Diverse Sexuality and Gender) side of things that is also, they're having to out themselves on that. And when you have to do both that, that can be really difficult for people. Um, especially if they aren't clearly identifying which lot of people with disabilities don't.

Topia Ryan-Jones

Although I think, um, I think like if, if they're dating you, they probably know you're gay, like (laughing) At that point, they know. Laughing...

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Do any of you have any tips on how to make it easier? Any of you found a way to kind of get into that dating scene? Meeting people with a disability and being able to, you know, get in there and have some security. Anybody found some great places to do that? Wait we've got the roaming...laughing.

Audience Member

Um, well because I currently have a partner. I don't. I identify as bisexual, but I currently have a male partner and he is completely deaf. He has implants. And I think the biggest tip, because I didn't know, until like I was playing with his hair as you said, that fear, he was scared that I was going to reject him after I found out. But I was playing with his hair and I felt the implant and I think I just had that exact same reaction. I was like, oh, okay, whatever. (Laughing) I think the biggest tip is to just accept, like it's something that they can't change and obviously it's something that's impacted their lives a lot, but they can't do anything about it. You can't do anything about it. So just love them for who they are. I think that's the biggest tip that you can give anybody.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you, that's so great. Is it possible to have a healthy and thriving dating relationship or marriage if you have a disability? What if only one person has it and that's kind of what we were talking about earlier or if both people have it.

Sam Noonan

Um, I feel like if both people have it, the, the main advantage is that you both know exactly where you are coming from. Danny and I, you know, if we've, if we've had a bad day, if we've fallen over something or someone said something really ridiculous, like you're so inspirational because we hate that one. It's like, no. Yeah inspiration porn, yeah. (Laughing) I think it was Stella Young that coined that one 'Inspiration Porn'. Yeah. You just, I mean, it's difficult in some ways because our social life can be a little bit limited because it's not like we can just get in a car and go do something spontaneous, which is annoying. But you do get used to that. Yeah, it's mainly just that there is that empathy and there, there are just absolutely no airs and graces you, you know exactly what's going on. You can accept it because it's going on with you too. There are no questions, there's nothing to hide. So, I think it helps in that respect.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

It's really interesting to see that you have that kind of empathy and the fact that you said there's nothing to hide.

Sam Noonan

No of course not. You know, we fight, we carry on about, oh money and toilet seats and god knows what, you know, the same things that everybody else does. But if we happen to be having a bit of a downer because of the blindness issue, it's fine. We just discuss it, get it off our chest. It's over with.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

We're going to talk about our families and our family units and how family units are different. So my family unit currently is myself and my partner, Steph and we are, as I said, ready to get married in three weeks. Our entire living room is filled with boxes and it looks like, you know, pride is currently happening inside our living room. You know, we're trying to, like, box things up. She's buying more stuff. Um, and I've got three boys from a previous marriage with a male and they are 9, 11, turned 11 couple of days ago and 12 so it's a bit hectic in the house. Um the eldest boy is does have ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). So, it kind of shows itself in a way

that it's quite hyperactive. He's very um to the point. He is very limited in kind of the way that his social interactions can be. He can be loving, he's lovely, he's very intelligent, very high flying at school. But if you tell him something like, you know, oh, shut the front door. No, he doesn't understand that. He expects to shut a door. He doesn't get things. So that can be hard on his brothers. It can be hard on us. And then on top of that when we have a kind of family unit things, going out and with the wedding we have the thing where we've had to deal with family members who you know, "are you taking the boys to the wedding?" Of course I'm taking the boys to wedding. That's on top of the family members who don't want to come because it's a gay wedding. So, it's all different things in family units.

Does anybody here want to talk about kind of, how their family is made up and how you kind of work with your, your family and how kind of, different things impact?

You know we work very well and it's all about, give and take. It's all about understanding each other and understanding your kind of, boundaries. And I can say my partner is... took on the three boys and myself in their stride. They'd always been a person who said, I don't want kids. And I'm sure a couple of the people here who know Steph, know that, that's what she always said. I don't want kids. And now she's ended up with three and two dogs. So, it, it's our family and we all love each other.

So, who would like to start?

Tanya McGee

Ok, well that was a big question and I totally forgot it. So, like I said before, um, with my eldest who is currently at the early stage of trans-gendering where, one, just celebrated one year on testosterone. As a Mother it was an interesting experience from my side. My child came out as gay at 16, which was fine, very loving environment, that wasn't an issue, no problem, the whole family's very accepting. So we have a great family. When they decided or not, they decided when the time was right for them to say that they wanted to, to transgender. Um, sorry, I'm trying to be so politically correct. It's so difficult when it's not part of my makeup. So, if I stuff it, I don't mean to to...

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

This is a safe, this is a safe space. We all know....

Tanya McGee

Yeah. If you knew me, I say it with love. There's no malice behind it, so I apologise already. Um, so when they wrote me a letter, that's how they told me was via a letter. I had an absolute breakdown that day. I believe I had given birth to a girl and now all of a sudden my little girl with the curly hair wanted to be a boy. I had to get over my issues with that. Not, um, my child's issues. My child didn't have an issue. My child knew what they wanted to do to feel right, to feel.. whole, I guess. Um, and I probably got over it and I don't know, a day I cried for a whole day and then it was like, right, ok. "Can I still call you by your girl name?" "Yes mum. That's ok. But when I decide I want to be known as my boy name, I'm going to give everyone three months to adjust and then that is it. And I will get offended." And we totally respect that. So, we're, one year in, um, we're now currently looking at top surgery, so that's the next process for my child.

Um, and they've come a really long way. I really long way from being in a very bad state where... I'm trying to say they instead of she, laughing, um, so forgive me.... When they suffered a lot of depression, went through a really hard time, put on 50 kilos in weight. Um, and since they made this decision to transgender and start the testosterone, it's the best thing that's ever happened. Absolutely. All of a sudden, all this weight's come off. We're positive, we're happy, we're starting to make steps in life to get further in life. It's been a really positive experience. Um, I guess my child is lucky in a sense that the family unit is very supportive. There is no one in the immediate family that has an issue. Um, some already starting to call my child by their boy name, their chosen name, which is just a beautiful thing to see. So that's my eldest.

Now with my youngest who's 19 and severely autistic. They have the usual sibling issue where, you know, they love each other, they hate each other and it's been going on ever since I can remember. Um, my eldest has always been a Carer of the youngest and that's been difficult. That's been really, really tough. Did that add to the depression? Possibly. Um, I don't know/ Um, my eldest hasn't really said much about it, but I think it, it has, it's, it's a tough gig when you're a sibling. It got to a point where, when the eldest turned about 18, they decided, Mum, I can't help care for the youngest sibling. And I guess I don't know if I did that deliberately to give them that caring role or I saw it as a family community thing, that that's what we do. We all look after the one that needs it at the time, but I respected those wishes, so the eldest kind of pulled away a lot from going to functions, going to anything that sort of supported the youngest. And I had to respect that as a parent and that's fine. That's not a problem.

My youngest will probably always call the eldest by the girl name and it's, it's kind of been a bit of a touchy issue with the eldest, um, on that respect. But they also have to understand that the youngest can't understand this process. There's no possible way that she's going to understand how did I go from having this girl sister to this brother. Um, so that's, that's a little bit of dynamics that we're sort of working on at the moment and working through.

Um, I, like I said before, have always been in relationships with men my whole life. I had my two children through their father, never saw myself as gay. That's the truth. I've always been a straight woman. And then all of a sudden, I had this woman's stalk me who... laughing. Honey I won't embarrass you now. Laughing.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Well that's one way to do it. I suppose

Tanya McGee

It had to do with, yeah, nipple piercing and all the rest of it. But anyway, we won't go there. (laughing) So, um, yeah, so she happened to stalk me and all of a sudden, I've got these feelings for this female, which is interesting. It's like this has never happened before. I'm not attracted to women. I have never been attracted sexually to a female before. Um, and all of a sudden, here's this woman who I'm thinking, oh my god, I have feelings for her. This is different. This was only a year and a half ago at the age of 47. So, it's not like I'm 20. It's a lot older in life. And then you start getting all the comments of "You're not gay, since when are you gay," you know, this and that. Or "if I am ever going to have a friend who's gay, I knew it'd be you." Um, so you kind of get all these really weird, strange comments. I've got to admit at first it was like, ha ha ha ha. Now it's like, you know what, it's getting a bit old now. You know, do I identify myself as gay. I don't know.

Am I gay that....

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Do you have to?

Tanya McGee

Yeah well, that's the whole purpose. And that's what I say to these people. Ahh (sigh) I see myself as me and I've fallen in love with a person who happens to be a female. It's not that, you know, it's a female, it's a male. (Yeah) And it's always so interesting in dynamics with your closer friends and your family and it's like, oh, you know, oh, at the very early stage, "Oh, you're bringing her." And it's like, well, if I was dating a guy, wouldn't you expect me to bring this guy to x, y zed. Is, is that because it's more acceptable still, you know, more so than bringing a same sex partner. It's just been really interesting to see. Yeah. Those around me who do love me and do absolutely accept my relationship. I've been very blessed.

Again, my family is wonderful. We have your typical big ethnic family and they're very supportive. Um they're very loving. They're very respectful of my partner. And Yeah, we have an interesting little family. I call it our normal family. It's the partner, the two kids, two dogs, you know, there's, there's no difference to anyone else.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Definitely. I completely can identify with that because I know my partner had the same comments. In fact that she definitely have more of those. Um, "oh yeah, we knew. We knew. We don't know what... no, of course we knew even (inaudible)..

Tanya McGee

But how did you know, how did you know, do I have a sign above my head saying that when I'm 47, I'm going to come out as gay? Like that was never going to happen. It was never, you know, and, and then they start, well, are you still attracted to men? And it's like, well, I'm actually attracted to no one. I'm attracted to my partner

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

To this particular person.

Tanya McGee

Yeah. That's it. I'm, I'm not oogling at any particular sex you know, it's, yeah. Yeah. We're in a very committed relationship and I'm very blessed that like yourself, she has taken on myself and my little diverse little family. And is it the fact that she is...or... gay? that it's made it easier with my eldest that's trans-gendering, you know, they're, they are, they are close, they talk about anything and she's exceptional as well to the youngest that is quite, you know, disabled. So, I'm just very blessed

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

That's lovely. It's really lovely to hear, you know, that kind of like that positivity and just that the way that it's just like, it's normal. It's your family. You just...

Tanya McGee

It is. I guess the only time that I have that sort of moment is still when I go shopping at the local shopping centre and you know, and Trace will put her hand around my back or just a normal thing that we would do, you know? And, and I'm like, oh is someone going to see. You have that split second, you know, in, in your brain. I don't know if that's a normal thought process for someone that has known that they are interested in the same sex from a younger age or is it something that it's because I'm older that I feel that way. I'm not sure.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Interesting guy.

Topia Ryan-Jones

It was the same. Well, I only came out last year because I dated men as well and it was the same for me that split second in your head of being like, oh, but it was a bit easier down here cause my family's from out in the country. And my biggest thing was if I ever go back there, Laughing, um, with a partner. But yeah, it was the same for me. I don't think you're alone in that at all.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

I like to do the thing where you kind of, you look and you see the little old ladies kind of smiling at you..

Topia Ryan-Jones

Or frowning at you.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

No! It's to be honest, we live in the Shire and there's, there's more often than not it's a normally a little smile from usually a little old lady who then tells my partner that they love her beautiful hair cause it's all brightly coloured and that's usually what we get. So, I'm always looking out for those, those little bits as well as those like, oh god, are we going to get something? Yeah. Sam at the end.

Sam Noonan

Um, my theory kind of is that, I think a lot more people are bisexual even if they don't ever act on it because I have only ever dated men, but I have had crushes on girls and my um husband,

Danny knows this. Like we openly discuss things like this, that if the right girl came along I probably would be attracted because I'm attracted to the person. Not, not, you know, what they've got or what they don't have.

It's, it's, we've got the family situation where Danny's older brother is gay, my younger brother is gay. Our daughter happens to be gay. So, it was just like, oh, ok. Yeah, whatever. Like, the.. there was just, there was no drama, there was no, ooh do I accept this or don't I? It was just matter of fact and she was just very matter of fact about it. Her partner is now living with us, her partner's mum consents to that. That's fine. It's all cool. Um, and we've always openly discussed sexuality, um, with our kids because it's, it's just been like that in our family with, with the two gay Uncles. My mother has sewn um Mardi Gras costumes one year. Uh, so yeah, uh, that's, that's just the way it is. And then when you add the disability well, again, that's just the way it is. Our girls have had to accept that, that we sometimes look like a freak show with the double pram and the toddlers and the two guide dogs and the kids yeah. Laughing...so yeah.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you. It can be really interesting how we have families that have, I know my partner, her, her brother's gay always, he was always gay from, you know, very, very little. Um he now does pole dancing as a hobby and he dresses up as Elsa and will do a frozen pole dancing rendition. So, my sons, you know, my sons, have seen their uncle and I know my youngest, he very much likes to dress, he dresses up as ahh, Marshmallow de WineHuis which is his drag name (laughing) and he will dress up in his little heels, his Aunties heels, which he's grown out of at nine years old. He's grown out of his Auntie's heels, but he's very much is himself, Ernie.

And then he will be Marshmallow de WineHuis for a little bit of time and then he's not a fan of the wigs if we're honest. He doesn't like anything with a fringe. He likes a nice lace front that goes back because then it doesn't get in his eyes or his in his mouth or on his lipstick. So all families are different and they love coming round, you know, their Uncle and Auntie are hairdressers and one's a makeup artist. So, they come round and they do them all up and they become, it becomes really a family matter when you try and like drag everybody in to try and yeah, as I said, he's got his Auntie's old heels. He's got his Uncle's old sequin top and wigs. So we, we kind of have all the different things in our family.

Topia Ryan-Jones

'Marshmellow' is the best name.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

It was 'Marshmallow' and then he decided cause somebody else had 'Marshmallow' as a name. So, he added the 'de WineHuis' because that was the first time he ever did it, he had this big black wig on that we had to pin back out of his eyes and he looked like Amy Winehouse. So... (laughing).

Let's go on to the media. If you could break any one stereotype that's within the media or TV shows, movies for people who have disabilities or people who are with Diverse Sexualities and Genders, what would they be? When, when do you feel kind of disappointed when you watch things? For mine, so having a cleft lip, you can hardly see it, but I do, I see it more than anybody else. And no matter what my Mum says, I still see it more than anybody else. Now when for me,

anybody with a cleft lip in the media is generally kind of shown on TV shows and in movies to be either evil or stupid. And it's, it's true in the UK we had Emmadale, I don't know if any of you are Emmadale fans? No. Anybody watch the soaps?

Librarian

No one's going to admit to it.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Oh please come on. Come on. Someone? And they had a character who had a cleft lip, who was stupid. And it's always those people or you have them with a cleft lip and they're shown as evil cause they've got a face scar. And for me that's, that's the thing that I would like, they're always, that's how I get affected by those things. Anybody else have something that they feel that...

Bronson Lloyd

So, for me, like everything around my autism its, and generally it's the Sheldon Cooper type, like super bright, can't, can't tell emotions. Which is really weird cause I can tell emotions. I have a hard time with them, but I can tell emotions. Or even if it's with like transgender people it's always like this Cis man playing a trans woman or if it is a trans person playing a trans character that always getting into a bad situation like Orange is the New Black where she's in prison or like Transparent where she's like an old, older woman who is played by a Cis man so it's kind of weird like it's never a trans man, which I can't never relate to, like a random like random Cis woman doing this stuff.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you. And I think that is, and that's a point that's always being made is that role's being taken by other people and that representation, no matter how good a actor it is, you don't feel like they're actually representing you. On this end.

Topia Ryan-Jones

My biggest annoyance is that when there is someone in a show where they're usually they have a disability or they are LGBTI and it's never both because the, it's just too much diversity for one show doesn't happen. (Laughing) Doesn't happen. No intersectionality there. At all. Ever. It's the fact that either way it's the feature of that person, not just like, oh, they happen to be, et Cetera, which is how it is for most people. And also like, I'm not going to feel your face. (yeah) I'm not going to. (Laughing) No!

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Laughing, we have some snaps here. (laughing).

Sam Noonan

Yeah, we don't know everybody's voice just instantly...

Topia Ryan-Jones

We don't wear sunglasses all the time. Like don't yeah. Yeah.

Sam Noonan

And it's funny, um, with the whole DSG (Diverse Sexuality and Gender) thing, the thing I don't like is that, in the lesbian couples, say, oh, there's always the butch one and there's the really feminine, gentle one. That annoys me because so many times I see that it doesn't happen that way. So why is that one still persisting?

Topia Ryan-Jones

Yeah. And I feel like as well with those kinds of romances, like whether it be LGBT, (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) uh, or DSG, (Diverse Sexuality and Gender) I was like wait, wait, which letter am I up to? Um, laughing...

With any kind of diverse relationship or relationship with the person with a disability, the storyline is always someone getting over it. It's like it's an obstacle and it's, yeah, it's, yeah, it's never like I just like to like have sex and chill out and go on Tinder and like have a normal life. It's always like, oh, this big romance kind of drama, yeah...

Sam Noonan

Or the, um, the other person is the carer. I'll, I'll take care of you. I'll help you solve all your problems.

Topia Ryan-Jones

I am your Prince Charming slash you know, knight in shining armor kind of thing.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

That's a disappointment that, you know we need to be able to be our own knights in shining armour. And sometimes I can say I see many people who are, who have disabilities, who are saving other people. It needs to be shown more.

Do you think the uh, Diverse Sexuality and Gender should be shown more within the media? Do we, do we need more of this? Do we need more disabilities shown within the media? And is that the worry that we'll just get more of the same that we have? Cause that's the thing. We have these issues where as I said, everybody I see with a cleft lip is always evil. Do I want more people? I don't actually, I don't want to see more of them because at the moment that's all they do. I'm just going to see more people, so I think... Does anybody have any ideas on how we could kind of educate?

Topia Ryan-Jones

I'd love to see it where they just completely ignored it. Like it was just there and nobody talked about it at all. They were just like, oh yeah, all right, this is my friend. She has a cane or this is

my friend, she has a guide dog. And nobody ever mentioned it again. Like it was just the little things, that it was just there. Yeah. Like same with I guess people with any sort of physical dis...like a cleft lip, it's just there. Just ignore it and just have that be the norm, kind of thing.

Sam Noonan

I'd also like to see more actual real disabled actors. Yeah. Instead of like that that really pissed me off in Glee when I found out that Artie actually could walk. (Aww) That actually really did annoy me because he was really, really good and I thought, ok, they've actually got this right. And then no.

Topia Ryan-Jones

So, let people represent themselves. Yeah. Yeah.

Audience Member

Um, I think as a society as a whole need to come up with a whole different word that isn't 'normal'. Like 'normal'. Everyone says if they have a disability, oh, you know, we um, can do it just as well as the 'normal' people if not better. So we're still using normal to define a disability and I think we need to change the word 'normal'; out of society and just be, I don't know, but not normal because what is normal?

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

And that's the thing is anyone really normal? Everyone's different. We're all individuals, so what is really the 'normal'? Um, I worked for disability company and I find every disability company you come to then has a big capital 'A' and then ability in capital letters and that, that actually never actually makes..I know, we all know where they're going. We all know what they're trying to achieve, but it's not. It's just highlighting the 'dis', if we're honest. and they are trying with, we can see that they're all doing it under a ... laughing and yeah with you working in disability obviously you're shaking your head because you understand, nodding it here just like yeah.

It's something that as you said, the normal. Maybe if we didn't look at the word disability and we looked at normal and changing that, then we wouldn't have these 'ability' issues where we have the disc as well. So yeah.

Audience Member

Thank you. I think the, the real issue here is the, that's the thing that most people don't realise. Every single person on the face of the earth is disabled in one way or another to one extent or another, and we all just have different amounts of it that we have to put out to overcome the same things as everyone else said. Yeah. The second way to get rid of it, is literally disability doesn't exist. We're all just differently able, even though that's a cliché term, everyone's got issues, everyone's got problems, but we're all the same and we're all different.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you. And that's, you use the 'Same Same But Different' here. And that's the thing is that as you said, I firmly believe that every single person in this room has a disability. It's just everybody has a different one. And at the same time, everybody has something that they are truly amazing at that's different to everybody else. And it's just, it's just the problem with society is, we've grouped together a certain amount of characteristics and a certain amount of abilities and we've said they're the good ones. What is really, we need to make up everything for everybody. We're never gonna.. you can't all work out if you're the same. You need to have different strengths. You need to pull together as teams. And that's why it does seem strange that we do have these things that 'abilities' and 'disabilities' and you know, whereas one person's disabilities is one person's strength.

Librarian

Has anyone seen the Netflix show Um, 'Special'? So, it's um, about, um, Ryan O'Connell and his memoir. And he's got cerebral palsy and as a Gay man and it's basically about like his life and dating. Um, and it's all just straight down the line of this is, you know, this is life, this is messy and this is just what happens.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

We're like 15 minutes into it. Yeah. And I was going to say about representation in the media. I recently watched, um, a movie 'Down Under' has anybody seen that one? It's actually about the Cronulla riots. It's a black comedy and they have um, a man with Downs Syndrome in it who's acting and he, when I worked for Sunnyfield, he was a bit of a celebrity. He came by and they all watched the movie and he, he's done quite a few things and that's a really good movie to see if you want to see someone with a disability acting with his disability. He was always in on the jokes with a disability and a lot of the things that he did in the movie were things that he had wanted to put in. So that was a really good way. It's called, it's called 'Down Under' and it is out now. It was in the movies last year.

Penelope Desmazes

The other thing that I find working with people with intellectual disabilities in particular is the assumption that they don't have any sexuality, not that they're Asexual, but that they yeah, are children and are not, have not anywhere in the sexuality spectrum. They can have no choice about sexuality and that is a major issue that a lot of people face on a day to day basis that there is just that pure assumption that they have no interest and no consideration of and no option for choice. And that's a huge, it's either that extreme or the other one where it's seen as being, um, things come up and it becomes portrayed in the media as verging on paedophilia at points or of deviant behaviour when that's the only two options that people with disabilities are often seen as having in media, such as newspapers, those sorts of things as opposed to television shows. But that's a huge stereotype that I think is really needs to be dealt with and managed.

Librarian

Is that, is that changing for those people that do work in the sector, is that changing so that people with intellectual disabilities like you know, in terms of their sexuality, like is that being recognised more? Or is that still something that the conversation is not happening or is it the stigma's right from their parents and their carers and that kind of stuff?

Penelope Desmazures

I think there is change. Um, well I hope there is change and that, that that does happen, but it's still there in a huge way all the time. Um, we come across it with, from all sides, from service providers who are, um, faith based or have traditional values, um, and don't wish to do it. We come across it from families who have that real belief that their child has the ability of a three-year old as, yeah, but they've got a body of a 19 year old. There's said there's a difference there and that you have to accept that. Um, and so that becomes a challenge with some families, but also with the general public. That people will walk down the street and say, oh, isn't that a cute little girl with Down Syndrome? It's like, no, that's an adult woman with Down Syndrome and she is quite capable of having a relationship. And so, there is still those stereotypes there.

I think things are improving and I suppose the same as as um, Gay and Lesbian relationships are more accepted in the community now. People are becoming more accepted, accepting generally that is improving, but it still has a heck of a long way to go.

Tanya McGee

I think because, um, I find being so heavily involved as well with the disability world through my youngest, they don't see 'sex' as; "I'm female I have to be with male," you know, like how we're brought up, you know, like myself in younger days, you know, you're female, you'll get married to a man, you'll have children and go on like that. I see through my eye, my child's eyes that she doesn't see a person with dark skin, white skin, different religious beliefs or anything like that. She doesn't discriminate or anything like that.

So, for her, she was very fixated on another young girl in her dance group. Ok? She was very affectionate, always cuddling and wanting to have a kiss on the cheek and wanted to hang out and hold hands and sing and dance. And it was really cute. And you know, there's always these little silly jokes of, oh, could she be gay? You know, could she be, you know, you know, attracted to this girl? You know, Bailey, like you said, she is 19 but with the mental age of three, you know, she's still will have needs and wants. This other young lady got a boyfriend. I don't know how my child understood that because of her mental capacity. But as soon as this young girl got a boyfriend, she backed right off. It was really interesting. Fixated on another young girl in her group. And it all became about this other young girl. Well, going back to the first girl that got the boyfriend, they broke up. From that second, she's now obsessed again with this first girl and it's all about her. And it's, you know, can we go to her house? You know, she's very limited in speech. So, she'll say her name, let's say her name is John you know John's house, you know, or whatever, you know, she just wants to go and hang out with her and have sleepovers and you know.

Does that mean there's something more, does that mean that is she sexually attracted to this female? It's, it's really difficult to understand when you have a child who's very limited in speech and everyone associates her as a three-year old, can you pursue it as a parent? Would I be pushing it as a parent and pushing her to one direction or, or the other direction? Or how do you let it grow on its own? You know, trying to take her needs into consideration. It's a really difficult thing to understand.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Yeah, it's, and I think you're doing the right thing by putting yourself in her head, in her shoes and trying to see it from her and giving her that kind of, that empathy. Trying to like put yourself with her. So, and I think that's the only way you can do at this stage is to try and just work with that and understand they do have wants and needs.

I've been in many service providers and heard someone say, oh no, no, he's not allowed to touch anyone and it's someone who wants, but he just wanted a hug. He just wanted to pat someone on the shoulder. But that was not allowed because they believe that he's going to take it too far. So, he gets nothing. And that's very sad. We expect them to be happy. Some people respect them to be sad. We expect them to have all these emotions, but as soon as they want to have that connection and that love in a term of physical way, even from a touch, that that's too much.

Topia Ryan-Jones

Um, the condescension is extremely frustrating even for like physical disabilities, I think. Because you are assumed to not have a sex life or to have a very like, traditional way of living. And then, especially as a young person, that's just not true at all. Like, and um, and then especially I think in the DSG (Diverse Sexuality and Gender) community, there's, I, I found that there's a lot more acceptance and normality because it's just such a diverse group of people anyway. That it's like, ugh, what does it matter if someone else's just got another thing that's you know different? It's just so people have learned and grown to be accepting of people as people I think in a lot of ways. And then so there's just that even though it's the Same Same But Different, but there is that understanding there of some sort of commonality, common ground that you've had to be resilient and you've had to be accepted your whole life kind of thing. So, I think that makes a big difference. And you know, there is that assumption that you don't have that sexuality. It's just kind of like it. Yeah, it is frustrating.

Sam Noonan

Well, the amount of times that say taxi drivers have said, "oh, so he's, hey yo brother?" ah, no, no,

Topia Ryan-Jones

My brother and I get the opposite, like is he your boyfriend? I'm like, no, no.. (laughing)

Sam Noonan

Um, you know and it's assumed. Like, "oh, oh, they your children?" Yes. I did the deed they're my children (laughing).

Topia Ryan-Jones

The reason they assume that is cause like I was saying earlier, I, my brother and I have both have disabilities, the same family. I have Retinitis Pigmentosa and he has Cone dystrophy. So, he has terrible day vision and I have terrible night vision. So, when it's daytime I guide him and when it's nighttime he guides me. And so, they see someone guiding another person and they think, oh, they're in a relationship. You know, again, it's that caretaker thing that's assumed. Yeah. In actuality it's not, it's not that they, you know, and that the whole being gay as well on

top of that is not even an assumed thought. This, it's just another thing that people have to be like, oh my God, you have all these labels. You have so much. Like, oh, you little snowflake. (laughing) It's like, actually it just means if you want to get a bit spicy, you don't have to blindfold me. That's all this means. That's it. Like, it's just...(laughing)

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

You're saving time you're saving time.

Coming back to that, do you think that the uh, Diverse Sexuality and Gendered community is more accepting of people with disabilities? I bring this up because last year I didn't actually manage to get here this weekend, but last year when we came to Miss Roxy's wonderful reading ah story time, um, I was surprised at the amount of people with disabilities, both physical, intellectual that were there. It was more than I'd seen on any event that we'd had at the library. I get dragged along to quite a few. (laughing) Um, and I just wondered why that was? Why do you think that that was an event that people obviously felt comfortable to go to? Because some of them, a lot of them didn't have kids. A lot of them just went because it was like they felt like maybe it was a safe space. Do you think?

Topia Ryan-Jones

again? Yeah, I was going to say it's the safe space thing. You're going there with an assumption. Not just an assumption, but like a knowledge that there's already going to be diversity so it doesn't matter. Everyone there is going to be diverse in some way. So, it doesn't matter you, you can go and assume that. And it's not to say that this is everywhere, but it feels more comfortable to go to something like that where there's that knowledge already that this is a safe place that you're not allowed to be, like you're not allowed to discriminate, you're not allowed to... Everyone here is going to be ok with everyone else and all of their identities and personalities, you know, and you just have to be ok with that. And so, everyone there is ok with that usually. (laughing)

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Yeah and it was. It was a really lovely thing to see. As I said, I was shocked at how many compared to other events at the library and it was, it was really, really nice to see that this is, and that was made a safe space and it was a safe event. And it's really nice to see things like this, that are putting people forward and putting people in the forefront and that acceptance of whoever is here, we're all here for the same thing.

Penelope Desmazes

I think that it, the disability sector is catching up with the, um, LGB (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual) community, but it has taken a while. I remember that originally, you'd often go to disability events and there wouldn't be an Auslan interpreter, but you would go to gay events and there was. It's like hang on, we're getting this the wrong way around, technically speaking. And that was a huge thing for me.

And I also, um, was involved quite a few years ago now, but with a, a launch in small country town, the local um gay community put on a launch of the Priscilla movie and all of the fundraising went to disability services and the whole of the Gay community was incredibly

supportive and accepting and they were out there wanting to be part of this. And I had my bosses at work giving me that look and saying, "who is running this?" Oh, well, you know, the local Gay and Lesbian support group. "Oh, ok. And, um, who will be organising?" It's like, yeah, we're doing it. And you can almost feel them looking at you and reassessing.

But so yeah, there was a, a degree where disability services had to catch up. I think they're doing better now. Well, I hope we are, but um, I think that is something that the Gay community is really good at.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

And I think is showing the disability services where to go. I think the problem with disability services in my opinion was that they were very stakeholder led by the parents and the representatives and very often those parents and representatives had their own values. They had their own views and those were put directly onto those people who they were supporting as opposed to um, "we have come out, we've decided" and a lot of us have come to have to decide whether they give or take what their parents have thought or believed and that actually have changed them. Whereas a lot of time people with disabilities don't have that opportunity, they're being represented by those people.

I feel that as you said, we're catching up the disability sector in order, but I think that has been from the support from Diverse Sexuality and Gender groups and also seeing what things can be achieved and the staff that are working and people, especially service providers opening up themselves and taking on people who have Diverse Gender and Sexuality.

I come from a company where every single house has at least one or two workers there that are Gay, Lesbian, Transsexual, any... we've got lots and my current company is super diverse and it's really nice for the people who we are essentially caring for. They can see that. We're not just giving them that one mould fits all.

Penelope Desmazes-

I have to say that my boss would have been quite surprised at the number of his male staff members who were very good in high heels that night. (laughing)

Librarian

Just changing the topic just slightly, um, with all the acceptance and everything, are you saying that in terms of the LGBT communities where the accepting of the disability community, um, and then like, you know, the disability community is really accepting of the Lgbtqai (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, Intersex) plus see alphabet? (Laughing) Um, um, how has that been reflected in terms of like I know that both communities will often have a lot more mental health issues then within the general community and stuff. And I'm going to ask Bronson that, cause I know that you do a lot of work around like Headspace and stuff.

Bronson Lloyd

So, for me, um, I have depression and anxiety and pretty much a lot of that comes from... it's really weird cause like a lot of my depression came from my gender stuff and it did, it kind of made it really hard for a long time and um, it does make a difference when like people in the

disability community, like I had like so many experiences of like people that telling me that I was wrong, in the disability community. But like the LGBT community, accepted me for just, who I was, not just this, this person, you're just like a thing. Sorry.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

That's ok, so I do think that also accessing those mental health things is very difficult sometimes for people with a disability. I think the fact that having places like headspace, being able to do that is, is good. But it's actually for some people with a disability knowing that they can go or having somewhere that's accessible for them to even get to. I know I was looking at a psychologist the other day from one of our young people now they use a cane and they can't go up three flights of stairs, but this psychologist did have that, they had no way. So, I had to organise for the psychologist to come to a different location and it wasn't the best option, but it was an option cause they wanted that specific person. And sometimes accessibility is the hard thing and sometimes mental health isn't even picked up. It's put as a secondary thing. I know working with intellectual disabilities very often, mental health hadn't even been considered when they got to our service provider. It was just part of their behaviour. Whereas if somebody else had had the same feelings or thoughts or experiences, they would be referred to a doctor.

Sam Noonan

Well, when, when I had my oldest child, I ended up with very severe postnatal depression and it's now turned into clinical. Um, I have had a bad experience with a counsellor because a) she was very difficult to get to, so I'd get really stressed getting there and then getting back. So, it kind of undid all the good work she was doing. She also assumed that all my problems just stemmed from the blindness. And as soon as I could get over that, it's like, no, this was chemical imbalance caused by having a child, now what do I do about it? Like, I think the assumption is yes, of course you sad, you know, you've got a terrible life. You need to just, just deal with it and you know, it's not like that at all. So yeah,

Topia Ryan-Jones

That's literally exactly what I was going to say. (Laughing) Of course you're sad, obviously you're sad. Nothing we can do about that. Sorry. Yeah, no, it's, um, yeah, it's, that's, it's true. And it's obviously not true clearly. Like.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Has any of you accessed good services that you felt have really got you and been really easy to access?

Bronson Lloyd

Um, so for me, Headspace, like pretty much took me on a straight away and they helped me with like my sensory issues. They helped me with my transition. So, with my eh, like everything that was going on for me for like a couple of years, they just let me go and just able to see the whole picture, not just like, oh he does trans and that's it or I'm a, I'm a disability and that's it. They saw like, oh that's a part of me and that was not just me there was, like, a whole part of me that other things were going on top of that.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

That sounds like a really good, good service. And I know that actually Headspace is everywhere. So, the fact that you found somewhere that you identified and also was age specific, do you think that helped?

Bronson Lloyd

Um, it definitely did help for me just because I saw a psychologist like when I was 16 and she clearly did not know anything about like Youth stuff and like the way she spoke to me was like I was five and I did not know what I was talking about (inaudible), which was really quite hard.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

So that's really good that they have that and they treated you like the young adult you were and are and they respected that and you felt really valued. Anybody else found someone or a place that's really good or has it just been kind of people just being like, well of course you're sad, of course you've got troubles.

Tanya McGee

With, with my eldest um, accessing service in their trans-gendering journey was difficult. There's a psychologist in Wollongong that they've been accessing and the one previous was phenomenal. They used to have a support group in Wollongong, um, and used to meet and you know, they all used to get together and have a chat and that was phenomenal. That stopped when this psychologist left and this new one's taken over who still really good. But that support group has gone.

Um, the clinical side services as far as specialists, um, they have to go to Concord. So, it's all through Concord hospital. Um, and it's quite interesting to note that Concord Hospital said that the biggest growth in their clients going up there is from the Illawarra. Um, it used to be the Newcastle region, but they, they say there's this massive explosion from the Illawarra that's now going up there and using the services up there and they say it's crazy that they don't have like almost like a mini service down, based down here for people that want to transgender because they're phenomenal. I've got to admit, they've been absolutely brilliant with my child.

I can't fault them at all to the point that, of course I'm the overbearing parent that had to go on the first visit and sit on everything and you know, I wanted to make sure everything was, was kosher, you know? And it was all good and it, it was respectful for, for my side, as a parent, you know, to have this specialists say, and how were you with this Mum? You know, are you ok? You know, I guess it kind of validated my feelings even though, again, it had nothing to do about me, but it validated, you know? Yeah. You know, I am ok, this is good. I'm glad I'm talking to you. I'm glad you know you're not some crazy Frankenstein that's going to, you know, take body parts out and willy-nilly, you know, in the next two months, you know, not making my child wait and go through the proper, proper journey I guess you would call it of, you know, just making sure you're doing it for the right reasons. And I was really happy with that.

But yeah, I guess from my experience with my child, more services in that Trans community would be fabulous in the Illawarra. You know, we had this conversation today in the car about, you know, surgery and, and I said, ok, so once the top surgery is done, let's talk about the

bottom surgery part. You know, how does that go? Is that just a doctor that just does one way and that's it. You know, have you spoken to other people that have gone through this beforehand?

Cause I believe communicating with people that have gone through the same journey is really powerful, (Yep) much more powerful than anything else, than reading it from a book or, or whatever, you know, a specialist, you know, but understanding that, yeah, this could happen or that could happen. Are you mentally ok? And all the rest of it. And their response was, Mum I don't know anyone that's had it done and my heart broke. My heart really broke as a parent that my child is going on this journey. That can be quite scary as well. It's like the unknown. They really want to have it done but don't know what to expect apart from reading what's on the Internet. They're very knowledgeable in XYZ types of surgery and you can get this surgery done in the UK and you can get this surgery done wherever, but not here. And I think that's, yeah, that's really sad to hear.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Just to say we've got just enough time for one more. Here we go.

Audience Member

It's just in reference to what you were just saying then. Sorry. Now does your child have anybody to speak to who identifies as Transgender? Have they met anybody who they can talk to?

Tanya McGee

Not someone that's gone through the process. No.

Audience Member

Ok, after this, find me. I'm the man in a dress. (Laughing) I have some friends who are quite young and have just had top surgery. Um, and I know that they would love to talk about their experiences with someone who doesn't have somebody to talk to about it.

Tanya McGee

You're gonna make me cry...

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Awwwww (Laughing)

Topia Ryan-Jones

We're going to all cry... (laughing)

Tanya McGee

No, that's really beautiful because I think that's really important to have, you know, um, positive, I guess you could call it, not role models but you know, others that have been experiencing

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

That have walk, walked that path...

Tanya McGee

...that mile, you know, and you don't think that your flesh and blood is the one paving the way in the unknown and the scary

Audience Member

And uh, uh, Transgender is so badly misrepresented in the Gay community and I have only been doing drag for three years and in the three years that I've been doing it, I, I have been misidentified as a Transgender woman, so many times. I'm a man, I identify as a man, but I have so many friends in the Gay community who are Transgender and who identify as Transgender. And yeah, it's very similar in the respects of, um, people with disability in the Gay community are so miss, uh, represented.

And I just wanted say what you said before Bronson, you put up a, ah point that in TV shows and everything in the media, Transgender um female to male transition role models aren't there. I can't think of one movie that I've seen, when you said that, where someone was in your position that you could have identified with from watching TV. So you've really made handling...pardon?

Bronson Lloyd

We have Glee, we have Glee.

Audience Member

Oh yeah. Yeah Glee, well, well Glee is amazing in that respect. The, Glee did represent a lot of, a lot of people uh, but in saying that, that's one show, you know, um, it's ...(inaudible)

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

And it still had its problems.

Audience Member

Yeah.

Topia Ryan-Jones

It was still Glee, come on. (Laughing)

Audience Member

When, when you get a lot of straight people, um, who identify as straight and don't know the Gay community, haven't had the involvement in that trying to represent it for you. Same with, you know, someone with a disability, trying to represent someone with a disability. It's so different until you lived it.

So, my sister has down syndrome. She's five years old in August. Before then I was so uneducated on disabilities. I am a different person in the last five years because of her. And I'm so grateful for that. Um, I don't think she's going to be Gay. She might, she might. She loves doing drag. (Laughing) I've dragged her up a few times, she's Little Horror. Um, but you know, it's, it's opened my eyes from having someone in my family with a disability as to the lack of it in my own community, you know...

Topia Ryan-Jones

Siblings are amazing support systems yeah.

Audience Member

Oh god yeah. She is the happiest little girl I've ever met and on her fifth birthday, I'm going as Emma Wiggle to her birthday party. Yeah.

Topia Ryan-Jones

Awwwww...

Audience Member

Because she's obsessed with the Wiggles. I'm going to do a few spot numbers as Emma for her.

Topia Ryan-Jones

That is gorgeous

Jenny Thompson

Oh. Um, I would just like to ask, what do libraries or can libraries do? What, what would you suggest? What, what can we do to just, I guess contribute to everybody's journey that you're all going on?

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Yeah, I was going to say this. (Referring to the panel discussion)

Topia Ryan-Jones

This (panel discussion) is pretty great actually, yeah.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

I believe this. (Panel discussion) The little stickers that you have in the windows, having all of the things that you have on during this month and all the other things throughout the year. I think just doing those things, having the resources, having the resources out so people can see them. I saw them on the way in the door, you've got your cabinet, someone's put your stuff in there. Having new books come through, having, just all the things that you're doing really, at the moment. And then more so, just more of what you're doing.

Topia Ryan-Jones

Accessible content as well. Like you guys tend to be good to get audio formats, all that sort of thing. I get a lot of my stuff from like online, but I know a lot of people don't do that. Um, but I know you guys have audio books and you have I think some things in Braille and?

Sam Noonan

No, no. I can help with that. (Laughing)

Topia Ryan-Jones

Um, and the spaces as well, making the literal physical space accessible. If you guys could, you know that the main glass door that opens at the front, the alarm thing right in the middle of where the door opens? Massive problem! I run into it at least once every time I come here. Yeah. But um, yeah, in general it's a really, this sort of thing is amazing.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

And tailoring your events. So, Comic Gong had a quiet room, had a quiet room with some sensory stuff going on I saw. You also had someone helping people across the road. It was a bit of a gauntlet other years you were like, ah, get across the road before a bus hits us. But it was really nice having those things where you could kind of take your time. And it was, it was nice that those were taken or thought of and taken in something that happens every year and we can see how that's evolving. And every year you seem to add one more layer onto how it can be more accessible and for everybody. So...

Topia Ryan-Jones

The other thing is like every person that I've like asked for help at the library has always been really good as well because like with the computers and stuff, sometimes if I need it, like I need to print things in the past or whatever, it's a bit hard to use. And they have all been really supportive. So, I just wanted to say that like, you guys do a really good job of that.

Librarian

Now that the library love fest is finished. (Laughing) I'm going to thank Jacqui. Thank you very much.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you.

CLAPPING

Librarian

Um, and thank you to all of our panelists.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you so much.

Librarian

So thank you all for coming and thank you to everyone that's in our community.

Jacqui Gilday (Moderator)

Thank you.

CLAPPING

MUSIC

Jenny Thompson

You've been listening to the panel discussion *Same Same But Different* recorded live at Wollongong City Library on Tuesday the eighteenth of July, 2019.

I'd like to thank all our panellists for sharing their experiences with us; Bronson Lloyd, Tanya McGee, Penelope Desmazures, Topia Ryan-Jones and Sam Noonan and a special thank you to Jacqui Gilday for hosting the evening chat.

For more information on Wollongong Libraries and Wollongong City Council's work with people living with a disability please go to (insert relevant website here)

"If this discussion has raised any difficult emotions you can call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or go to the Headspace website for support and information."

I'm Jenny Thompson, Manager Library and Community Services. Thank you for listening.