

# Connected Us – The Listening Guide for the Community Sector

*A podcast all about human connection and our fundamental need to belong.*

Brought to you by Befriend and Podcraft Productions, supported by Lotterywest.



Befriend works in partnership with community organisations to nurture connected, thriving communities. In working closely with some of our key partners, we know that times are changing, and learning and development of community workers is evolving in shape and form. We know that this is a sector of ‘people-people,’ who love to learn through story and conversation. We also know that people are looking for learning experiences that are ‘bite-sized,’ that they can access and engage with autonomously, from anywhere, at any time. And we know that people love to learn through conversation with their colleagues. So we thought we’d take learning & development ‘out of the workshop,’ and experiment with a different way for people to develop their perspectives and ways of working to nurture connection, in their own life and the lives of the people they support.

This experiment is called ‘Connected Us.’ It’s a pilot podcast series featuring seven conversations with individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Each episode intends to offer fresh perspectives and stimulate conversations about the experience of connection and belonging. Whilst we hope this podcast will be

personally enriching for staff in their own life, we also see the potential for the series to stimulate the development of new thinking and practices in supporting connection.

We hope that Connected Us will encourage you and your colleagues to reflect more deeply on the contributions you make in your life; to yourself and to those around you, as we work together to weave connected lives for us all.

# About this Listening Guide

This Listening Guide is a helpful tool you can use to spark reflection as you make your way through the series episodically. These questions are just some suggested lines of enquiry that we thought you might find valuable and interesting to consider. You're welcome to consider any of these questions individually, or with a friend, co-worker or team in a more facilitated, conversational setting – it's your discovery, your own learning journey. . Often, the most powerful, transformative answers are within us.

We are all whole people, living our lives playing many roles; we're neighbours, friends, family members, co-workers, citizens and professionals. So, we ask that whilst you listen, you reflect on all of the roles you play in your life, their interconnectedness and their impact on you and those around you. With this perspective in mind, you may cultivate a deeper awareness of nurturing connection in your own life, and discover how you might be increasingly able to do that for others too.

These podcasts have been recorded on land where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been telling stories for generations. We want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

# Episode 1

## Alyssa Nixon-Lloyd – The Builder



*Alyssa Nixon-Lloyd has always had a keen interest in community. Growing up in a small country town, community-building was second nature to her family who were actively involved in community life. When she moved to Perth to study, Alyssa brought this same sensibility to her life in the city. In this episode, Alyssa talks about how she creates community - whether through hobbies or interests or simply her day-to-day interactions.*

*For Alyssa, the building of community starts with an open attitude towards others. Whether it's feeling empathy for someone who seems annoyed or starting a chat at a bus-stop, Alyssa's focus on incidental connections creates a sense of belonging, regardless of where she lives.*

### **Food for thought:**

1. How might our society benefit from all of us thinking about '*building community*' throughout our daily actions and interactions? What's important about that to you?
2. What could '*building community*' throughout daily actions and interactions look like for you in your daily life?
3. What excites you about that possibility? What do you think holds you back?

4. If you were to run a small, achievable experiment of '*building community*' in your own life for the next month, what might that look like?
  
5. What might a first step (or a 'next step') look like for you?

## Episode 2

# Dr Roger Patulny – The Sociologist

*If there's anything we've learned from 2020, it's the value of social contact. And while many of us have developed ingenious ways of maintaining contact throughout the pandemic, there's nothing quite like being able to be in close physical proximity to another human. So why is this so important to us? What do we gain from face-to-face social connection that we can't replicate through digital connection?*

*In this episode, we talk with Dr. Roger Patulny, a sociologist at the University of Wollongong who studies the importance of social connection and the impact on those of us who are isolated.*



### **Food for thought:**

1. What social experiences did you miss most during the recent times of 'lockdown' and physical distancing?
2. What impact did these experiences have on your understanding of social isolation? ?
3. How did these periods of physical isolation affect those around you?
4. What new awareness has developed for you about the presence of social isolation, in your own life, or the lives of others?

5. How might you turn that new awareness into a new intention? What might that intention be?

## Episode 3

### Dr Loretta Baldassar – The Researcher



*We see a lot in the media about the downside of online connections and the superiority of face-to-face friendships. But is it all bad? In this episode, we talk with Dr. Loretta Baldassar whose research into online relationships finds that the digital world actually has a lot to offer in terms of social connection. Whether it's teenagers engaged in lively online social worlds or elderly relatives living far away, Dr. Baldassar has a refreshing take on what it means to be social in our contemporary world.*

#### **Food for thought:**

1. What does face-to-face connection offer you in your life and relationships that connection through the digital world doesn't?
2. What does connection through the digital world offer you that face-to-face connection doesn't?
3. How do you think your attitudes and beliefs about technology influence the way you look at 'supporting connection' for others? How do your attitudes play a helpful role? How might they be unhelpful?
4. Who do you know that doesn't use many/any digital technologies as part of their 'connected life'?
  - a) Is this a conscious choice of theirs, or the consequence of something else?

- b) What impact does that have on their experience of connection?
- c) How do they feel about that?
- d) What could you get curious about exploring with them?

# Episode 4

## Valerie Weyland – The Dreamer



*Valerie Weyland dreams big. In her early 20's she moved by herself to Australia, a place where she knew no-one, to play basketball. Once here, she established herself in a close-knit community of Indigenous women who shared their stories readily with one another. After she married an Aussie surfer, Bali was next on the agenda. There too, she found comfort and company in a circle of local women. Throughout her many adventures, Valerie has experienced a feeling common to us all - loneliness. But through her journey, Valerie has developed a suite of creative abilities to help her through tough times. Embracing a mindful philosophy of radical acceptance, Valerie is an embodiment of the saying "be the change you want to see".*

*In this episode, we talk to Valerie about her adventures, her dark times and where and how she found comfort.*

### **Food for thought:**

1. What resonated with you from Valerie's story?
2. Can you think of a time when you felt deeply lonely? What did you do or develop that changed things for you?
3. What opportunity do you see in the experience of loneliness?
4. Who do you know that is experiencing deep loneliness?
  - a) What factors do you think might be contributing towards this?

- b) What is the potential within that person yearning to come forth?
- c) What could you get curious about exploring with them?

# Episode 5

## Fee and Leslie – The Optimist and the Listener



*Felicity, or Fee as she is known, has a happy knack of seeing the best in everyone. As a woman with an intellectual disability and autism, her fearless view of the world empowers her to make connections wherever she goes. But while Fee’s optimism in the basic goodness of humans has enabled her to create a rich and independent life, she has also experienced feelings of isolation and being excluded.*

*Leslie has been Fee’s support worker for six years. As a mature-aged worker and mother, Leslie often feels protective of Fee but works actively to manage this in order to respect Fee’s self-determination and independence.*

*Over the years, these two very different people have developed a close bond based on trust and non-judgemental acceptance. In this episode, we hear about how this relationship was formed and why it’s important to both of them.*

### **Food for thought:**

1. What impulses do you notice in yourself when someone confides in you about a challenge they’re experiencing?
2. Can you think of a time when someone gave you a listening ear, without giving you any advice? What was valuable about them refraining from giving you advice?

3. What do you think is the difference between **empowering** someone and **helping** them? Can you think of a time when you've helped someone, rather than empowering them? Why do you think you acted in this way? What was the limitation here?
  
4. Sometimes when we're working with people with a disability, we feel protective and worry about safety issues. Can you think of examples of this in your work? How do you balance the person's autonomy and your responsibilities?
  
5. Many support workers are an important social connection for people who might otherwise be quite isolated. How do you currently support people to live a more connected life? What could you do differently?

# Episode 6

## Dr Bec Waters – The Empowerer



*When we talk about creating inclusive communities, this means finding ways to grow meaningful connections with people from all walks of life. But in attempting to make these connections with people with disability, we sometimes unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes of vulnerability. So, how do you create authentic, meaningful friendships that are truly equal, without resorting to the sort of “help” or “assistance” that can be both patronizing, undermining and irritating?*

*In this episode, we talk with occupational therapist and disability rights advocate, Dr. Bec Waters. Bec teaches a unit about disability at Curtin University and is well known for her strong views on how much of our “help” actually keeps people with disability in a position of disempowerment. In this truly eye-opening discussion, we discover what genuine connection with people with disability looks like.*

### **Food for thought:**

1. What resonated with you from Bec’s story?
  
2. Think of a time when you made an assumption about someone that turned out to be inaccurate.
  - a) What was the assumption that you made?
  - b) Where might that assumption have come from?
  - c) What effect did it have on how you engaged?
  - d) What effect did it have on the other person?

- a. What helped you become aware of your own assumption?
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3. Think of a time when you were experiencing a challenge in your life.
    - a) What nurtured your own self-determination in moving through that experience?
    - b) What undermined your self-determination?
    - c) What role did others play?
    - d) What are you seeing about the forces that can nurture or undermine a person's self-determination?
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4. Where is a situation in your work or life where you intend to engage differently?

# Episode 7

## Dave Lindner – The Facilitator



Talking about a rich community life and engaging more with others is all very well, but how do you get it started? Dave Lindner is Befriend's Community Connector - he's the guy who helps people create new communities and connections. In this episode we chat with Dave about the challenges inherent in kickstarting community and why you don't need to feel that you're alone in trying to figure it all out. Dave knows whereof he speaks - he shares his story of loneliness as a new migrant and how he overcame a variety of barriers before finding his feet with his people.

### **Food for thought:**

1. What resonated with you from Dave's story?
2. What is a 'community' that you feel like you are a part of, a context where you feel like you belong?
  - a) What helped you 'connect in' to that community?
  - b) What do you think has contributed to developing that feeling of belonging, for you, in that context?
3. Think about someone you know who is searching for a sense of 'community.' How could they turn the tables and 'create community'? What do they think would be helpful in that journey?