

[00:00:00] Welcome to the Inclusive Governance Podcast. I'm Dr. Bernadette Currier. I've been leading a research project exploring the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in organizational decision-making and governance. In this podcast, we'll be discussing what we've found in our research. There will be four episodes in this current series.

Each one will cover a different aspect of our findings. In today's episode, we're exploring what inclusive governance means. I'm excited to have Katrina Sneath join me for this discussion. Katrina has been working alongside me as a co-researcher on the project. Hello, Katrina. Hi, my name is Katrina Sneath.

I have worked on the Inclusive Governance Project since 2021, and I am a passionate advocate for people with disabilities. My message is believe in yourself [00:01:00] and don't let your d- disability get in the way of anything. Thanks, Katrina. Our focus for today is inclusive governance. So to start, can you explain what we mean by inclusive governance?

Inclusive governance means that people with intellectual disability are included in the governance and decision making of community organizations, particularly disability related organizations, and may i-

include having a place on their boards To understand inclusive governance, we need to understand the term governance. Governance of an organization is the oversight of the management and direction of that organization. In the disability and community sectors, this is often done through a volunteer member elected board.

Governance includes activities such as setting a strategic [00:02:00] plan, financial oversight, approval of policies and procedures, and employment of the senior manager or executive officer. There is a growing expectation that boards are also involved in ensuring quality of services and safeguarding of clients.

Catriona, so why is a governance structure that is inclusive of people with a disability, including intellectual disability, so important? People with intellectual disability have a right to being included in the discussions and decisions that may affect them. This isn't just at a personal level, but also at a service delivery level.

Yes, and this right is included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states, "People with a disability will effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs [00:03:00] without discrimination and on an equal basis with others." As well as being a

right, another reason is that organizations can benefit from diversity on their boards, reflecting their communities and stakeholders.

The needs and perspectives of people with intellectual disability should be heard, understood, and considered. There are a small number of disability-related organizations who have been successfully practicing inclusive governance for years. This includes New South Wales CID, Self Advocacy Sydney, and VALID in Victoria.

These organizations not only hear the views of people with intellectual disability, but have included them in their decision-making processes. We wanted to see this practice expanded to many more organizations, particularly organizations who provide services to people with disability, and to have people with intellectual disability as their clients. [00:04:00]

So Side By Side Advocacy, a disability advocacy organization in Parramatta, applied for funding to conduct a research-based project exploring how inclusive governance could be supported. This project was funded by the Department of Social Services through an NDIS ILC grant. We spoke to 27 people. Some were board members with intellectual disability, some were board members with other disability or no disability,

some were senior staff like ex-executive officers, and some were support people who supported people with intellectual disability on boards. And what were we trying to understand, Katrina? We wanted to understand their experiences of being on a board or [00:05:00] working with boards. We wanted to know what, what helped boards to be inclusive.

We wanted to know what stopped more people with intellectual disability from taking part in the decision-making of organizations. And so what did we find out? It was very interesting to talk to the, to the people. We recorded what they said so we could, uh, listen and think about it more. Five main ideas came out of what we heard.

We call these themes. These themes were about the value of involving people with intellectual disability, how people came to be on boards, what helps them to feel [00:06:00] included, what good support was like, and the barriers that stop inclusion. Bernadette, do you want to explain how each of these themes helps us to identify the principles of inclusive governance?

We thought about the main messages that came from each theme. Then, with these in mind, we thought about what would guide the implementation of

effective, non-tokenistic inclusion. For example, theme one reports on the value of inclusion, and so the need to value inclusion in governance and decision-making roles was identified as a first principle.

We identified five principles in total: one, inclusion of people with intellectual disability in the decision-making and governance of community organizations is valued. Two, there are clear pathways to board membership for people with [00:07:00] intellectual disability. Three, board meetings and activities are accessible, meeting the inclusion needs of people with intellectual disability.

Four, individualized skilled support is provided. And five, there is a commitment to making inclusive governance work. I like the principles and hope they help organizations act on inclusion. We will explore these five principles in our next episode. Our conversation was recorded on the land of the Burramattagal clan of the Darug nation.

We pay our respect to elders past and present. The Inclusive Governance Podcast is a project of Side By Side Advocacy. We're a nonprofit organization specializing in advocacy for people with intellectual disability. You can find out more about our work, including easy-read information, on our website, [00:08:00] [sidebysideadvocacy.org.au](http://sidebysideadvocacy.org.au), or call the Side By Side Advocacy office on 02 9808 5500.

And we've linked more information about our research project in the show notes. The research project was funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. The Inclusive Governance Podcast is produced by Dani Stewart. I'm Bernadette Currier. Thanks for listening.