**Transcript**

**Disability and Climate Change Workshop, May 2022**

**Greater Dandenong City Council**

**Voiceover:** Greater Dandenong City Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of this land the Bunurong People and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise and respect their continuing connections to climate, culture and Country. Disability and Climate Change Workshop. May 2022.

**Lefa**: Hello. Thanks to the City of Dandenong for having us here today. I wanted to, I guess, set the scene a little bit and talk about some of the elements that I think are kind of important when we talk about people with disability and climate change. As Steph said, I'm Lefa Singleton Norton and I am a disabled person and I have a particular passion for preparing for climate change and for all of us to be involved and to take what action we can within our communities to prepare for the future.

To set the scene, I guess I will talk a little bit about disabled people and the ways that we're already active in climate change movements, but also the challenges that we face. So, you know, the very broad statistics are things like 15 percent of people worldwide are disabled, 20 percent of Australian families have people with a disability in them. We are everywhere we're a wide range of people and as well as being disabled people, we're also parents and partners and workers and activists and friends, volunteers, pet owners. We hold positions from a senator in the Federal Parliament to president of our School Parents Committee and everything in between. Some of us are more visible than others and oftentimes we're found anywhere you would expect us, but also where we're at least expected. Sometimes as a group, disabled people face unique barriers to engaging fully in society and I guess it's worth pointing out that hand in hand with disability come lots of other factors. Like underemployment or unemployment, greater barriers to workplace participation and barriers to really fully living in society. And some of those barriers are the kinds of things that we do talk about often, and some of them sneak under the radar a little bit too. For disabled people, there are lots of compounding issues that surround disability, so things like insecure housing or people with disability often have lower incomes, even if you're in employment. Another compounding factor for example, is that one of the highest groups of people in our community that have a disproportionate number of disabled people are our First Nations communities. So as well as being disabled, you'll often find there are other issues that impact people's participation in society.

All of those factors do also make us more vulnerable to climate change. A statistic that we know is that in climate disasters or in any disaster, really, disabled folks are four times more likely to die, which is a really kind of stark statistic to think about. It's interesting when you start to talk about how disabled people are impacted by climate change, it really is even just in the most basic level. So even without climate catastrophe, rising temperatures in the world, a lot, almost all kinds of disabilities are sensitive to temperature change as a really basic point. So even on the most fundamental issue, even if all we're talking about is the climate increasing by 1 percent, 2 percent, we're already vulnerable and it already adds up from there. So there are things like the fact that we have less secure housing as a group, and that means we have fewer options when it comes to living in places that are built to withstand climate change. And also, we're kind of less independent about how we can change our housing to prepare for climate change. Often if we're in rentals, for example, we're frequently forced into cheaper housing further from public transport, even if we're lucky enough that that transport is accessible. And we're also more likely to be further from public facilities like hospitals and libraries and community centres and affordable shops, which of course, once you're in any kind of stress or disaster, are quite important for people. It's an interesting time to be having this conversation because I think as we've seen during the pandemic, the disability community are very frequently discounted and disvalued in wider social discourse. Despite experts like Kerryn Phelps speaking in the media to say that the pandemic isn't over, we're still in it and that elderly and disabled people don't need to be dying in the numbers that we are right now as we speak. More broadly, people seem to have decided we're acceptable losses, that vulnerable people somehow means, you know, not valuable people. We have so few avenues to protect ourselves other than staying home now and I guess the question I ask is I don't understand how quickly we went from we need to come out of lockdowns, which I think most people broadly agree we can't stay in forever, all the way over to masks are too hard to wear. Staying home if you're unwell or are particularly vulnerable is just something that we have to put up with. And really, I guess that nobody needs to change anything about the way that we operate in the world. We've somehow been through something that's over and we've moved on, in my opinion I think wearing masks to protect each other in indoor environments like shops is kind of the absolute minimum that we could do as a society or should be willing to do for disabled people. Most of us are still wearing masks in those kinds of environments, and right now we can't even do our grocery shopping with the safety of being able to rely on other people to wear masks. And that can be difficult, not just in a practical sense, but also when you feel like that is a stark choice people are making around you. And I think it's worth looking at things like in Asian countries where mask wearing has been prevalent for a lot longer, the thought process is actually fundamentally different from the way that we're thinking about it here in somewhere like Australia. If you talk to people from Asian countries about why they wear masks and what the process behind the thinking is, it's not reduced to masks protect me, it's actually talked about as the emphasis is wearing masks is a way to protect other people when you're sick, which is almost the antithesis of how the public conversation is happening around masks, for example, in Australia. And how we talk about coming to care for vulnerable people I think it's worth thinking about the fact that it is a state of mind that we're talking about, not necessarily a decision or otherwise from governments too, there's really not been a lot of public push back about the idea that masks can protect a lot of people who are vulnerable.

The pandemic is just one way and one example of the ways that disabled people are often treated as kind of unfortunate victims in public disasters, as if it's a kind of inevitability. But actually the hard truth is that more care and more concern and often more preparation would avoid putting us at risk in the first place. And there are ways that we can be more proactive and looking after the disabled community and I think, like I said, this is an interesting time because if we don't put in the effort to learn from the disasters of the past few years, including the floods and fires as well as the pandemic, how will we be prepared to support vulnerable community members who have so far been overrepresented as kind of victims in the lack of preparedness for climate change disasters. In floods, we saw citizens rescuing people, but those stranded people were kind of the ones who could manage to get to roofs and higher ground during the pandemic. A disproportionate amount of deaths in the early months were those in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. And I think we need to ask what we've learnt from this and what we're doing to ensure that disabled people aren't in that position. Again, we need to take stock, we need to talk about what we've learnt and share knowledge, which I hope is what events like this are able to do. And I can't tell you how much it means to be having this kind of a conversation come from a sustainability department. A sustainability department who identified the vulnerabilities of disabled people and asked what we do for this part of our community. Change definitely needs to come from all levels of government too but having this conversation is a terrific way to start drawing attention to the issues, to facilitate knowledge sharing and to kick start some action. Here are some things that I think are probably more hopeful than the things I've just been talking about. Some ideas and actions that I've seen that I hope we can look at as ways to adapt for the future.

The key thing that I think gives a huge amount of hope is the Centre for Disability Research at the University of Sydney has worked with disabled people to create the Person-Centred Preparedness Toolkit, which I think we'll hear a bit more about. It's very important because the two key documents that all levels of government use in terms of climate mitigation and strategies and actual implementation throughout the community barely mentioned disability at all. They discuss disability as a risk factor, but then they don't go on to talk about what we do about that risk factor and what that means for people who are not, you know, kind of esoteric risk factors but actual people. So the Person-Centred Preparedness Toolkit is notable because it's created by and for our community. It acknowledges our resistance and our innovation and our resilience in the face of challenging circumstances. So these are the kinds of tools that we really need to be developing and getting behind. Some local councils have increased welfare calls to elderly and disabled residents during summer heatwaves over the last few years. They've encouraged local people to check in on other vulnerable neighbours. So just that kind of care within our very local communities, we can be more proactive in looking after each other and I think that's really hopeful. During the pandemic I was working for Yarra Plenty Regional Library and one of our staff members came up with the idea to check in on older library members by phone to ensure that they had information about what local services were available through their council and how they could get assistance if required. And that was just one person's idea. She recognised that the library is a place of information for a lot of vulnerable people and that there were a few metrics that we could use, one of them being age within our databases to reach out to those people instead of the fact that they couldn't come to us while there were lockdowns and I think that's a really good example of people applying their thinking to how can we do what we do, but do it differently for people who need to engage with us. We also delivered books to their door, which of course always makes you very popular during a pandemic where people can't find something to read. When we were reaching out, some library staff members who were on the phone were told that this was the only voice that they'd heard in a week or in two weeks. And there was a huge level of response from the people that we contacted. The library is kind of limited in how much information they have about people, but obviously councils and other levels of government have more information about who vulnerable people are and how they can reach out to them and I hope that they will think more innovatively about how we can do that into the future.

You don't have to look very far to find internet forums and message threads where disabled folks are sharing hacks to defend against severe weather events. And I'm sure we'll talk a bit more about those practical elements that we can do but that kind of knowledge sharing is happening all over the place and it's invaluable. And I think there are ways that other people can be listening in to that disabled community or asking disabled people what it is that we need or how we're already dealing with these issues. Because being up front, it means that we have already been impacted by things that other people are only potentially just starting to come around to feeling personally. Something that's really important is that we need information for disabled people to be clearer and better distributed. As I say, Dandenong Council is doing an amazing job by having conversations like these but even on the web page for emergency preparedness in this council, there's nothing specific to disabled people. So there are opportunities to make sure that that information is there for more vulnerable members of the community. And when you look at a state level, Queensland are one of the only state governments to have a thorough guide for disabled citizens on preparing for emergencies. So they've actually put together a toolkit to help people look at the practical ways that they can prepare. We need to see more of that. I guess we ultimately need to be represented better too. There's currently a call out for people in this council to join the Disability Advisory Committee so I would highly recommend people have to think about doing that. But disabled people also need to be on all the other committees too. That's a great way for disabled perspectives from community safety panels through to library advisory committees to make sure that disabled points of view and lived experience is actually seen and contributed to in all those different areas. The current Disability Action Plan for Dandenong Council finishes in 2023, so now is a great time to get involved and to ensure that resilience in the face of climate change is a priority for local disability services and for council as well. Something I'm quite passionate about is the idea of mutual aid. And if you're not familiar with that term, it basically just means a group of people pulling together to help other vulnerable people within their group. So in my local area there's an LGBTQI plus community who focus on providing mentally unwell members of their own local community with free food drop offs during times of crisis and others provide a neutral space for people to come together if they are feeling lonely. And that one is geographically based for a local community. So it's different kinds of communities looking after different vulnerabilities within them. They kind of aim to fill the gap between more formalised services such as neighbourhood houses or Meals on Wheels, which can be intimidating to engage with during times of poor mental health for example. Or, you know, the incoming barriers can take a little bit of time. There are things that can fill those gaps.

The last thing I guess I want to leave you with is that I think this issue is relevant, but the answers lie in a lot of in a lot of ways in where we know the answers lie for our disability community, and that is dealing with ableism, full stop. So climate change is no different. Dealing with climate change is ultimately dealing with the ableism of all people, but through the lens of climate change, in an era where governments have been really inactive or irresponsible in the face of extreme weather events like we saw recently with the floods, no amount of activism by disabled folks to any level of government will ultimately make the difference on its own. We need a society that's more community minded and one that doesn't value people by their productivity or their usefulness, but actually looks at every unique person as valuable and worthy of what everybody else in the community is worthy of. So hopefully without having been too heavy, but I know we do touch on some of that stuff I think that's the kind of challenge that I would put forward that we all need to think about how our attitudes lead into, yes, climate change, but ultimately all of the issues that disability encompasses. Thanks.

**Jax:** Good morning. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Bunurong People of the Kulin Nations on whose land I am this morning and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend my respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who are watching this. This land was never seeded and the processes of colonisation, occupation, incarceration and genocide that began over two centuries ago continue to this day. In the face of this, I want to recognise the strength, resilience and pride of the Kulin Nation People of this land. So the image on the slide behind me is of the First Peoples Disability Network of Australia and they're are great grassroots organisation which is run by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities. If you haven't heard of them before, I really encourage you to Google them to look up the work that they're doing and to find out ways that you can support and amplify their voices.

Just a quick visual description of me. I'm a non-binary, queer person in my late thirties and I use they/them pronouns. I'm a white settler, I'm seated in my black manual wheelchair, I have short, dark hair and glasses. I'm wearing a top that is dark blue with pink flowers and black jeans and boots with rainbow laces. I don't know if you can see that on the camera. I also have dyslexia, so I find reading really challenging, but I'm going to do my best. If I stumble and lose my place this is disability space and I feel like we need to bring all that we are into the work that we do and what our access requirements are. So yeah, as a disabled person, I've been rescued and helicoptered away from an approaching bushfire. As a young child, it was really scary seeing the smoke bellow over the hill and knowing that it was coming. It was especially scary when my mum went back into the remote bushland and fought the fire. I remember days later returning and driving through the decimated bush, walking on my sticks through the charcoaled landscape and down to my beloved beach and into the sea which was full of ash. Alex Ghenis the lead Project Manager of the New Earth Disability Project at the World Institute on Disability, which addresses how people with disabilities will be affected by climate change and the necessary actions to adapt and respond, says “People with disabilities are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change because of health factors, personal and medical needs and already existing marginalisation true climate justice also needs to provide the resources needed to adapt and create equality for all and to transform our systems to do the same”. Disability writer El Gibbs asks the question “Are we including disabled people in our disaster plans, or thinking about what disabled people will need to cope with increasing unpredictable and extreme weather, air pollution or heatwaves? At the same time, are we including disabled people when we think about how to adapt to a changing world and how disabled people can be included in efforts to slow climate change?” The answer to these questions is no, we're not, and we really need to be. Disabled folks need to be included When governments, including local councils, do emergency planning. We need to be prioritised and safely evacuated when emergencies occur. We need to be consulted in the aftermath of disasters so the rebuilding efforts are fully accessible. As we say in the disability rights movement, nothing about us without us. If we continue to be left out, forgotten, we disabled people will be disproportionately impacted by climate change and we will suffer and needlessly die.

So my hometown is Lismore, New South Wales and the photo on the slide shows an aerial view of Lismore, with buildings partially covered in floodwater in the flood of February of this year. As I'm sure you're aware, this area has been subject to the worst recorded floods in white history. Houses went under and were washed away, people had to climb onto their roofs and hide in roof cavities, hoping to be rescued. The SES said it was too dangerous for them to try and rescue people and it is estimated that 70 percent of the rescues were done by local people in tinnies and canoes, desperately saving people as the waters engulf their home. The photo on the slide behind me shows people using small boats to travel through the flood water in Lismore in February. All I could think as I watched this tragedy unfold was what about people with disabilities who can't climb onto their roofs or get into tinnies? What's happening to them? I wouldn't be able to get on the roof or into a boat. And what would happen to my wheelchair? An essential piece of equipment which gives me my freedom and independence. I thought about my good friend who lives in Ballina and uses a power wheelchair and messaged her, hoping she was safe. I called my mum. She didn't answer. Reports were the places in Lismore which had never before flooded were flooding. My mum and dad live in East Lismore, a previously safe area. Many of my friends live in North and South Lismore, which is flood prone. But because of this the rent is cheaper and so it's more affordable. Many of my friends lost everything and just made it out. In a local nursing home, residents were left and locked in, saved by Pacific Islanders in boats who got them to safety. The photo on this slide behind me shows an elderly person being carried out of floodwaters by two people. Mum answered her phone an hour and a half later. She'd had to leave as the waters rose through her floorboards. She'd forgot to put things in plastic bags so the few clothes, her passport and laptop were soaked. Her phone and charger were luckily okay. She made it up a hill and called a friend and stayed at his place. Mum and Dad lost most of their furniture and a lot of their possessions and are still unsure if there's mould lurking in their walls. But their house is still standing and they're luckier than a lot of people. Then a month, almost to the day, another flood hit the town. Predictions were that it wouldn't reach the level of last time but it would still flood south, north and low lying areas of East Lismore. Then at five p.m, the authorities said it wasn't going to do this and told people they could return home. People returned only to get text messages at three a.m that morning, telling them they had to evacuate immediately. These changing messages by authorities have left locals angry and distrustful. There is a sense that you can't have faith in the services that are there to supposedly protect you and keep you safe. Many people don't have flood insurance because it's just too expensive. The internet was down, so people were relying on their limited phone internet to try and find out the most up to date information and power was down in a lot of places, too. And this is particularly difficult for folks with disabilities who may be on plans without much internet because we live in poverty or for older people who are using, who find using the internet really challenging. This was also true for my parents, who found it really hard to work out what was accurate and up to date information which they needed to follow. In excess of 1800 homes in the Lismore LGA have flood damage. The council is now proposing a land swap, enabling people to move from flood prone areas to higher ground. It's expected to cost more than 400 million. And my question is, will these houses be made accessible? Almost 4000 people are currently homeless. The photo on the slide behind me is Val Axtens who is 91 escaping floodwaters by sitting on a chair perched atop a table. For folks with disabilities, finding accessible and affordable accommodation was previously hard, but it's now impossible. Motorhomes are not an accessible option. Evacuation centres don't have accessible beds which can be lowered or hoists. Plus, COVID has skyrocketed in the region because of the close proximity of people in evacuation centres, which is a risk to disabled people. We need to do better at planning and responses to emergencies which prioritise disabled people, our access needs and our mobility equipment. I wouldn't be able to move without my wheelchair, yet if I was in these floods I would have to abandon it. The photo on this slide behind me shows a pile of mud covered rubbish, including a wheelchair in the foreground. There is no disaster funding in our NDIS plans and while there is some flexibility with how you can use your funding, many people are unsure of how they can use it. And if they do use it for emergencies they will be left lacking money for other essential supports. It takes months and months and months to get approval for replacement equipment if it's been destroyed, leaving people dependent on others. And we also must remember that only 10 percent of people with disabilities are on the NDIS. So who is providing support and equipment for the other 90 percent? Local councils can play a vital life saving and life changing role here. The Vulnerable Persons Register in Victoria captures only a small number of people, leaving out many older people with age related disabilities who require care and support in emergencies. Local council teams are vital supports in planning alongside people with disabilities for emergencies, responding in effective and flexible ways in a disaster and in its aftermath. Local people know what they need. Local councils are extremely important in enabling recovery for people and their towns.

The rebuilding of Lismore, whether it's a buyback scheme for businesses in the CBD and houses in north, south and parts of East Lismore or some serious flood mitigation. All these options need to include access at every point, not reinforcing exclusions as has been upheld by heritage listings of many old buildings in the town. The photo on the slide behind me shows an aerial view of a flooded church and other buildings in Lismore. Many old buildings are heritage listed and part of that heritage that we're preserving with heritage listing is a time when people with disabilities were locked up in institutions and if we weren't in institutions, we were kept at home with our families. We weren't provided the same level of opportunities to be part of the community. We couldn't access many of the employment opportunities, many of the public buildings and so I think particularly when disasters strike and we need to rebuild, we need to think about how do we embed universal access. How do we change the way that we structure our society so everyone is included and has similar opportunities. I realise I've focussed on flood disasters in this presentation, but many of the same issues in terms of emergency planning and response which fail to prioritise disabled people and our access needs, was also evident in the bushfires in Victoria of 2020. Now is the time to change the way we do things and to show that we value the lives of people with disabilities, our lives and contributions and to understand that if we don't act on climate change, the frequency of these disasters will occur and disabled people will and are at the frontline.

Alex Ghenis, the lead Project Manager for the New Earth Disability Project at the World Institute on Disability says “climate related migration is an especially large issue. People with disabilities are liable to lack access to accessible transportation, become disconnected from personal support networks, lose vital government and health care services, or simply be turned away at borders because of their disability status. It is our job to learn more about these many problems and to tackle them head on. Many solutions will include resilient government and health care systems, disability specific disaster risk reduction and even managing mitigation through accessible transit, housing and more. Switching to an adaptive climate justice mindset and beginning those preparations will require collaboration, focus planning, effective resources and wide scale public education. Thank you.

**Heather:** Hello, everybody and hello to those of you watching online. My name's Heather Lawson from enliven and my talk is really going to be focussing on flooding with Jax, to more about how to manage extreme weather. So particularly heat and also today, the cold. One of the things that I think many of us don't recognise is that more people die from heat related illnesses and through heatwaves than all the other natural disasters in Australia combined. Now that's something that I don't think is widely understood and we know that with the rising temperatures that there are going to be more heatwaves and they're going to be of a longer duration and so we really need to think about how we prepare ourselves for heatwaves. We had a mild summer this year. It was a humid one, bit different for us in Melbourne, but there were some days where it got quite hot and I think people, the presentations to emergency departments and also ambulance call outs for heat related illness really rise on those days. So it's just thinking about what we can do.

Now, what the people who are most at risk during heat waves and extreme weather and we're talking cold as well as heat and we know from what both Jax and Lefa have said, people living with a disability, older people and children, people who are socially isolated or living alone, people living on low incomes or living in accommodation that really isn't thermally comfortable, people with chronic illness and refugees and newly arrived and those with limited English because often our information is not compatible for them. It's not useful at all. And we've talked about climate justice already today, but those most at risk are impacted most, because generally there are multiple factors that impact on them. They're exposed due to inadequate housing or have higher sensitivity due to their already underlying health conditions. And often because of limited income, they don't have the capacity to turn on the air conditioning. And a recent survey found that 57 percent of people did not turn their air conditioning on because they were worried about the cost. So, you know, it all compounds and we really have to think about how are we going to support people and what people can do to help themselves. And this is one of the really important things.

We can do things to help ourselves in particularly extreme weather and hot weather. The biggest thing is drinking enough water. And for many people, older people, it may be challenging because if they're out their concerned where are the nearest toilets, how can I, you know, look after myself? But drinking water is the most important thing. And cooling and warming your home, like, how are you going to do that and how are you going to make sure that your home is as easily managed as possible? And this is where council's Home Maintenance Service may be of support to you and I'll talk a bit about that later. And the other one, checking in with others, making sure you're neighbourly you know, know if someone lives alone and they may not have anyone who's looking in on them, go and see them and see are they okay? Are they aware that there is going to be a heat wave and are they taking precautions and are they not planning to go out and do something in the heat of the day. The other thing, too, a lot of people put their medications on the bench. Now, if you read the fine print, which often is very hard to see, it says over 25 degrees these medications may not have the same impact as they should have. So thinking about where you keep your medications and checking with your doctorand your pharmacist, where's the best place to keep them in hot weather. Spending time in cooler places. Now councils’ libraries have been places where people go on holidays and also shopping centres. But how do you get there? You know, if you have a disability, is there accessible transport to get you there. Or if you're walking, how are you going to get to the cool place? Because often you'll get so hot getting there that the impact of it is lost. But the big thing is planning ahead. That is the most important thing to think about. We often have warnings and the heat health warnings come and tell us there's going to be a heatwave. So we think, well we're not going to go out on those days. We're going to have enough food in to prepare for that.

One of the things that can happen in extreme weather is heat exhaustion and heat stroke. And this is when our body becomes so dehydrated. But do you understand what the symptoms are? And do you realise when someone is in this situation? And that is something that I think also hasn't been widely shared amongst the community to understand. And I think with our Sustainability team here today, when you're working outside in the heat, you know, you know, when you're starting to dehydrate, you may have a headache and often that's due to lack of water. So it's thinking about what are you doing to keep yourself well and can those around you recognise if you are feeling this effect of dehydration. And of course many medical conditions and many disabilities, the ability to thermally control your body is not as acute and so you're more at risk of dehydration. And it is so important that people do understand these things because unfortunately in heat stroke, in 80 percent of the cases, it can be fatal So it is really important to know what the signs are and to get first aid and ambulance treatment to people as soon as possible.

Now Lefa has spoken about the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness work that's been done and I commend this to everybody to have a look at it because it is such a good tool and a workbook. And as Lefa told us, it was developed with people with disability and they had the final say on what actually goes into this book. But recognising the skills and abilities that people have and also their resilience and ability to work through all these issues, it is so important that the planning is done and if you do have a plan that it is tested, you've actually tried it out before the emergency comes. You're not waiting for the day when the floods come or the fires come or there's, you know, extreme weather and your house is unliveable. You're not waiting for that day to actually try this out. You've tested it. You know that you can get into the transport. You know where you're going, and then you can get into that place. So this is so important that people have a plan and I really do commend the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Workbook to people. One of the things I think we're all very aware of at the moment is that our electricity bills are increasing and with more extreme weather coming, it is important that people do make the most of the opportunities that are out there. With council's Home Maintenance Service and as Jax said, too often people on their NDIS plan, this sort of thing hasn't been considered at all to make sure that your home is as thermally comfortable for you as possible. So people who maybe don't have and that's the 90 percent of people with disability who don't have an NDIS plan, they could contact their local councils to see are they eligible for the HACC Program for younger people which is under 65 or the Commonwealth Home Support Program for people who are over 65 to access the Home Maintenance Service. And in Dandenong we're very fortunate because the Home Maintenance Service do look at the, that they do equipment safety checks and they check out your home for energy efficiency and insulation and those sort of things. So it's really making use of your local services. And there is another thing that the State Government has done, the Residential Efficiency Scorecard Assessment. Now there is a cost to this, but there may be opportunities hopefully in the future where those are subsidised. And you know how our white goods have ratings on them, how much water and power they use, well, the Residential Efficiency Scorecard does that for your home and so you know how efficient your home is and how much of the heating you're paying for is just escaping out the windows or the doors or through the floorboards. So that is an opportunity, and I hope that there will be opportunities for that to be subsidised as well.

And who to call in the event of an emergency. We know that there are a lot of services out there but Nurse on Call is a service that isn't widely known. I hope some of you have used that in the past because it is a first port of call If you can't get into your doctor, they will advise you as to whether or not your situation warrants you calling an ambulance or going to the emergency department. So it is a group that you can really call and it's free, 24 hours a day and there are interpreters available. So and triple zero in the event of an emergency. This is just a slide to show how hydrated you are. So if your wee is lemon coloured, you're drinking enough If it's not, you need to be drinking more. And it is so important, water is the most important thing for us in heat. And there are also, like talking about heat, we've seen where sports people will often put on an ice vest to cool their body temperature down and I know of people who will put their clothes in the freezer. They'll put a top in the freezer and change that so it just helps them get their thermal, their core temperature down. So there are ways you can do that. And the same if you're cold, there are now jackets that you can get that are battery powered that will keep you warm. So there are things that you can do, you know, that are rather than heating or cooling the whole room, you're just looking after your own body.

Medications, I spoke about this. This is so important to think about what you do with your medications. In hot weather and I have a poster on the wall here as well but this one is so important that we must never leave little ones or pets or anyone in the car because the temperature can rise so quickly. And you may think you're only going to be a short time away, but often something happens. So that's a very important point. And smoke, smoke during the, the black summer bushfires, we were troubled by smoke and the air quality was very poor for some days on a row and that has a huge impact because generally we want to open our windows up to let the cool air in at night. But if smoke's flowing in and you have respiratory problems it can be very dangerous. So just thinking about how are you going to cope if there is a bushfire and it's hot and you're still trying to keep cool. And just an opportunity that if anyone is part of an organisation, I can come and talk to you and just assist you in thinking about how you work with your participants and your staff to make sure that people are safe at those times. Thank you very much

**Audience member one**: Chris Stewart Disability Planner here at Council, one of the sort of practical things I've always thought about is that Council has a responsibility for managing disasters given a fire or depending on the environment of the fire or petrol tank that goes up or a serious accident that sort of thing, just your thoughts firstly on how councils could use that disaster management program if you're thinking about how it's inclusive, of people with disabilities. And just one of the issues that I've thought about down through the years is with the growth of changing places facilities that our council's putting into new large buildings, I'm wondering whether we could, start a program whereby changing places facilities placed in emergency management facilities so that when a disaster happens, a person with a disability's got somewhere to go and know there is an electronic bed, a supportive environment. So just your thoughts on those areas.

**Jax:** Yeah, I mean I think that that's a great idea. I also think and speaking to folks with disabilities, you know, in the Lismore area and stuff, knowing what accessible accommodation is out there in the community, so whether that be private rentals or hotels, motels, so that if people can't stay in the evacuation centre for whatever reason and they need somewhere that's a little bit more private but still gives them access. What is the role of local councils in terms of finding that for them and also subsidising or funding that for them in emergencies.

**Lefa:** Yeah look, I think, Chris, all of those things you've said are just spot on, but it's also having people with disabilities involved in the planning for emergency planning because you know, if they're not around the table, a lot of these things are not thought through so that's so important. I think particularly in areas like Dandenong where you have quite a mix of industry as well there are lots of different kinds of potentially smaller disasters, even and more localised issues that can happen too. And I think those are the areas where council is best placed to be able to identify areas of need and as you're saying, ensure that what actually is accessible within the community is appropriately distributed too. Yeah, if you can't get to a place that has the right facilities for you, then those facilities are not doing their job or they're not able to be used. So I think that's a really important point too.

**Jax:** And also has to make sure that information is distributed to local communities and to vulnerable individuals in a way that's accessible to them so they can understand what they need to do. I mean, the COVID pandemic and the press releases by the State Government were a prime example of that in that they did have AUSLAN interpreters on screen, which was great but they hardly had any easy read documents for people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities that were being sent out to community so that people understood how to comply with those orders and what they needed to do to keep themselves and their families safe. So it's about having, having people with disabilities involved from the outset, doing that co-design work, but also doing some of that forward thinking in terms of how can we prepare our teams in government to have some of those skill sets so that if we need to send out information to community, we can do it in the way that's most accessible. And I think thinking about what do we do if there's, you know, a power outage or if there's no internet. How do we still get those messages out? What does that look like? How do we reach those people? It's a really key question.

**Audience member one:** I think perhaps if I could just give another couple of points, the most councils and the City of Greater Dandenong certainly has well, they have a Disability Advisory Committee so I would suggest it's a good way if a person has a strong view that they can bring that issue to the attention of the committee and the broader council. And I think it was Lefa who suggested the council's Disability Action Plan, if there can be a program or an introduction of the issues relating to disability and environmental approaches built into that Disability Action Plan then that has some, can have some very positive results.

**Jax:** Yeah and I think it's good for Council to think about the makeup of that Disability Advisory Committee. How many of the people on it have direct lived experience? How many people are carers? How many people are from local disability service providers or organisations? Because they'll have very different skill sets, very different focuses that they're bringing. And another thing I'd love to see local councils think about from a disability justice perspective in relation to disability advisory committees is are they remunerated? Are people paid for their time and expertise that they're providing on those committees because they're currently not and people with disabilities often live in poverty or on the poverty line and so being remunerated for our time is, is a key move towards disability justice as well.

**Lefa:** Yeah, I think particularly when we talk about disability representation to local council and those kinds of areas, one thing I think about a lot is it's very important for us to have disability representation, but I often think about how disability is something that most people self-identify and a lot of people are not comfortable identifying as having a disability, but they might feel more comfortable with the term chronic illness or they might just say that they have health complications and so on and not necessarily even at every level of representation. But even when we talk about communication and messaging and how people know things, you know, you talk, for example, about the air quality during the bushfires and I think that was really interesting because there were many people who would not think of themselves as people with disabilities who potentially had something like asthma which is, you know, a manageable condition that they live with. But they found themselves very vulnerable during those times and they probably haven't had messages delivered to them previously about the fact that, for example, libraries or council buildings or community houses have great HEPA filtration and maybe the air quality there potentially could be better than your own home if you don't have you know, air filters and so on. So I think it's also a challenge of, and this is one way I think the disability community can be really positive for other groups, we're out there advocating for things that are good for people, whether they're disabled or not, but good air quality, good facilities for people to have heating and cooling, they're relevant for a lot of people who are never potentially going to get those messages directly targeted to them, because as we know, it's hard enough to get that information through to people who self-identify as disabled and to have good communication. So I think some of the things that we're fighting for definitely are of use to the broader community, but also a lot of the messaging that does potentially focus on disability is relevant to other groups as well. And we're kind of at the forefront of pushing for those things and pushing for that clarity in a way that is useful for other people.

**Audience member two:** This is Pradheep here, do we have a chance to be able to see data with people who's on the list?

**Lefa:** I think probably yeah, I think probably some of our local council staff members can probably answer that better than I can.

**Audience member one:** Sorry, I didn't hear that.

**Audience member two:** Do you have a chance to create the disability databases, that then you can contact people straight away?

**Audience member one:** Oh well I think that probably and I'll perhaps defer to others here but we have a, I think a Vulnerable Persons Register through our Community Care area which I know at City of Greater Dandenong in the past when there has been a heatwave some of our staff just ring people who were on that vulnerable register and say how are you going, is there something that we can do to help, that's something that Council can do as a structure, given that they have a whole set of programs in the community care area that looks towards supporting people who are either living alone in the community or for some reason are vulnerable. I personally like the idea of people with disabilities taking responsibility for their own situations and connecting each other up so that when there is a circumstance they can ring each other or talk to each other and support each other through whatever the problems might be. And I think that's lot of what was identified in in the Queensland program.

**Heather:** The local government here at City of Greater Dandenong for their Commonwealth Home Support Program which is people over 65, they do ring people who are living alone and check on them. The Vulnerable Persons Register is a bit different because that's one where agencies identify people and then it's the Police who have that register so it is a bit different and there aren't a lot of people in Dandenong on that register I think there may be only about 40 or...

**Audience member three:** From my understanding, it's Darren here from my understanding it's 50 or 60 people. That one’s notified by agencies outside of local government. We had our own HACC and PYP and in there is about two and a half thousand, in that number, but they're not necessarily the same people. So there are differences and I know in the past that the Red Cross have been trialling some projects in South Australia and it's the project that Heather and I have been involved with and they identified to us they could be having assistance to call a database, to call on extreme weather days et cetera. They could actually have people call those households to make sure that they're okay. So there are opportunities in ways which others have been brought into this so there is proof of concept of piloting things, so there is something we can learn at Council and undertake and really have those conversations. What's the best way for Council within its existing systems and it might be through what Chris is saying, there might be networks with disabilities in the area. We can take on that and council having a role as well and other agencies. It's really about having those exact conversations. How as a council can we work with other service providers who use service providers in the region to work out a system that's most applicable for our needs.

**Heather:** And there's also a ready to go program where volunteers are buddied up with someone and they then check and make sure that person's okay. But it operates in Cockatoo and Koo Wee Rup and Apollo Bay. I think there's places where it's operating and they work out a plan, what's going to happen when there is an emergency and someone needs to leave their home and they practise it before the day that just like we said with the person centred planning. So there are programs out there but they're not, like a lot of them are not widely spread unfortunately

**Audience member four:** Yeah that's been so interesting it's like many people with a disability, when you see the fires and the floods you think okay you do a bit of a look around your own house and think what would happen to me. And you know, look, I'm not going to be able to get on the roof, you know, and the dog, you know, how are we going to do that. We couldn't leave the cat behind. How would we do this? We couldn't. Who would know? We have trouble getting out of the house even if it wasn't flooded or there was an emergency who would actually know we are here? And I look around my neighbourhood and there's so many people living very happily, very independently in their nineties, but they're frail. That's the reality but so many people obviously fall through the cracks you know, a lot of people don't have any council services coming in at all you know, we certainly you know I've been thinking, what is this register? You know, what is it? And so there'd be an awful lot of people that we should know and don't know about and emergency services wouldn't know about who would definitely need our assistance. How do we work that out?

**Lefa:** Yeah, I think that's exactly the point. We are at such a turning point with the amount of very fast, very big emergency disasters that we've had over the last few years. We are having to face questions that perhaps haven't seemed as frequent or as big before. And I think this is such an important time for people to be pushing for this kind of change, for a more systematic view of what we have and what's working in different areas, taking the lessons from those and then applying them, as I said, the library thinking to call people, the only way that we could potentially identify someone who would benefit from that was to assume that people over 60 or 65 potentially were more isolated and maybe we should call them. That action would have come better from Council who could identify people who'd been involved in disability programs in the past or who did live in isolated areas within the council and so forth. But this is a case of everyone doing what they can in the pandemic. If we're not taking stock of what we're learning as we're going and what is and isn't working, if we don't do it now, it's just going to run out of control. We're kind of lurching from disaster to disaster at the moment, and yet it really is that bigger picture that we have to think about

**Jax:** It's also hard to get on the Vulnerable Person's Register, from my understanding, which is why there's so few people really on it and it doesn't capture everybody and I think this idea that we can all rely on the kindness of strangers or our neighbours in a disaster, I mean, that's a lovely utopian idea and I think we should try and develop connections with the local communities and with our neighbours. But I think that, you know, in the floods no one's going to stop and chuck my chair in the car and get me in the car. They're going to try and get out and get their family and their cat and dog to safety first and so they might not even be aware that I'm there by myself or there with people or with family, but then they might be thinking, well, how could I fit this person in my non accessible vehicle? What does that look like? So that's when we need to see you know, local government, state government, NDIS potentially think about ways that they could step in and provide accessible disaster management services that include getting people in new accessible equipment.

**Audience member four:** To something even minor, things like, making the draughts through floorboards or just minor things that will drop your power bills and that, there seems to be a really big drop in things from when you're under 65 and you're a person with a disability and all of a sudden you're just old, you're on My Aged Care and the magic fairy takes away your disability and you know, how does this work? And trying, so you don't have access to a handy man for even basic things that make you feel happy in a home that might be containing you more than you want you to be, you might prefer to be out and about, but you can't always do that. And you don't have access to even basic sort of things and I think that needs to be addressed, just because we're older doesn't mean to say that we're not valuable, we don't have a life to live you know

**Lefa:** And potentially you're facing, you know, kind of double issues or, you know, those kind of compounding issues even more at that stage of life and yet, as you say, the supports are removed and it's non-sensical.

**Audience member three:** I just want to say from a local government perspective, I think one of the opportunities is the Municipal Emergency Management Plans and the committees, so this involves Council as well as the regional authority such as Police, fire brigades et cetera. If I suppose every council was to look at how they included disability as part of their Municipal Emergency Management Plans, that would be a good starting point because unless it's identified as an issue in there, that's a starting point.

**Lefa:** Definitely. And I think, too, you know, when we were talking about committees before and one of my points was that disabled people need to be on all committees. I think it's also because from the smallest elements to the biggest, if disabled people are only having disability conversations in disability spaces, we're actually not learning very much and for example, if you have people who are on your parks committee, I don't know if you have one, but if you have a parks committee, disabled people have really unique needs in terms of their access to local green spaces because transport and you know, our kind of access to public spaces is reduced for a lot of disabled people. So actually having people involved and having their perspective put forward could potentially change things and not just the obvious things that we think about, like plain accessibility in terms of, you know, pathways and things like that, but actually what kinds of green space do they need? And those smaller things in local areas and potentially with your arts policy, again, it's not just can I appear in the audience at this event, it's can I appear on a stage at this event, are they accessible and so forth. And there are so many different aspects that come up in all of these areas but unless disabled people are on those committees, sometimes you are shocked at the smallest things that are missed that as soon as you have one disabled person in the room, they will point and say, but has no one raised this? And no, because those are conversations that we're having in disability only spaces. So I do think it's a really important point that disabled voices should be included in all of that, particularly emergency management.

**Jax:** Yeah, and I think as a key waythat you can signal that you want disabledpeople involvedis to put that explicitly inthe EOI, say we welcome applicationsfrom you know First Nations,LGBTQ people with disabilitiesand then think about how,how do you make that application processaccessible to people?Can they send in a video as opposedto, you know, sending in written questions?If they have to come in for interview,what does that look like?Some of that stuff to make it feelwelcoming, to make it feel like it'ssomething that they want to apply for,that they could apply for.

**Lefa:** Make it clearthat the meetings are in accessible spaces,make it clear that, you know,accessibility is something, you can do thisvia video call if you need to,all of those things.

**Heather:** And that there is remuneration there**.** So important.

**Audience member five:** I was going to say**,** you make a good point,we recently ran our SustainabilityFestival here just out on the grassand I was lucky enough to dropinto the Disability Advisory Committeemeeting to get some feedback, butI missed a lot and yeah, you're exactly right**.** There are things that I as a non-disabledperson just unfortunately wouldn'tthink of and I had some great tips to helpshape the festival, but it was still,there's still a long way to go,but it is so important to incorporatethose views right at the startof the planning process,not at the end of the festivaland trying to put in later. Soyes, something for me tothink about for the next festivalthat we run, or anything that we run

**Lefa:** Yeah, great point

**Audience member five:** I also had another, it's more just a thought, in preparing for this session I put together, I was just searching for all the sort of climate change or extreme weather event resources out there for people with a disability and obviously we've touched on that they're just lacking completely, but I feel like from this short amount of research that I did, it seems like Victoria is quite behind as a state. Like I discovered the emergency preparedness booklet that's from I think Sydney, say SES New South Wales had some really specific resources for people with a disability and I compared to the SES Victoria website and there's nothing like that. So yeah, just made me think Victoria's a bit behind.

**Heather:** The other thing that is a really good resource is the CFA, they have learning tools for both workers, working with people with disability and for people living with disability as to what to do and what it's like in, in a bushfire. And really, you work through different modules online and it's, it's well worthwhile. So that's the CFA

**Audience member one:** I think the other area that I'd like to think people with disabilities could do for themselves is when their NDIS plan is renegotiated actually ask for some support for managing their environment, their disaster plan.

**Jax:** They won't do it.

**Audience member one:** If enough people ask for itI would hope they might change.

**Jax:** So we've had direct conversationsabout that with the NDIA,they both say that they only fund goalsthat are concrete in your life across,you know,the 12 months or 24 months of your planand the disaster is a **‘**what if’ and they don't fund ‘what ifs’. So what has happened in COVIDis that they've then come outwhen there's been a pandemic or disasterand put it, they often hide it awaysomewhere in a website that says you cannow use your plan funding flexibly**.** For example, when we're in lockdown,we can get mealsdelivered to your dooras opposedto having someone come in to help youprepare your mealsbecause that was seen as a COVID risk,but it was only for a shortamount of time**.** And by using that money flexibly,as I said, it means then you might lackthat funding in other parts of your planfor direct supportworkers later on, for example**.** So yes, I hear youthat if we all keep advocatingfor that en masse, maybe they'll shift itbut that yeah, the multiplekind of conversationsthat I've been involved in and heardthey've definitely said it's a, it's a **‘**what if’, it's not guaranteed to happenand we all hope it doesn't happen,but they're not going to fund,they're not going to have money sittingthere that you could potentially use.

**Lefa:** I know of people who have approached the NDIS and asked very directly for funding to be able to cool their home, so portable air conditioning, you know, those kinds of elements and been told, no, that's home improvement or that's, you know, that's kind of outside the scope of your plan, even though they can show and that there are, you know, documentation from doctors that multiple people in that home need good air quality and need to be able to regulate temperatures and can't do that on their own. So this is where absolutely it's not even a ‘what if’, it's people who are literally already facing climate change and trying to prepare themselves and their homes, who are not able to use the NDIS funding to do that. And absolutely, you know, we should be asking and advocating for as much as possible, but it's really hard in the face of arguments like that, I think to have to keep self-advocating, particularly in systems like the NDIS that can be quite challenging yeah. There are a lot of barriers.

**Audience member four:** What if you flip that aroundand put the pressure back on the personwho is identifying that and denying thatand saying you've recognisedthat if something does happenthen you'll become, orwe're made aware of this and it's foreseeable...

**Lefa:** You can try. I think this is the problem is that it's a Byzantine system, but I mean, you know, I'm definitely not an expert, but in terms of people's access and, and in terms of the reason that only 10 percent of disabled folks, you know, have NDIS, even just engaging with the system to enter is a huge barrier for a lot of people because of their disabilities, not even because of other unrelated parts of their life, but then of course compounded by other aspects. But yeah, you, you have to be very determined, very self-propelled and have a lot of other factors working in your favour in terms of your doctors and their ability to give you time to you know, kind of back up your, your applications and your continued advocacy for yourself. It's, yeah, it's a real problem.

**Audience member one:** Lefa what experience have you hadwith electricity outagesand the responsibilityof the power systemsto keep a personwho is dependent on electricity?And similarlywith the internet,because we're all very dependenton the internetfor communication.I know that recentlyI've changed my electricity providerand they did askwas I in that vulnerable categoryand denied me some sort ofconsiderationfor continuingto have electricity connected.

**Lefa:** My only experience with this has been advocating for better information and access to that program. So I don't know whether anyone else can speak to it more personally, but in my experience, the problem is whether people follow the guidelines, which is that when you sign up a new customer, you are supposed to ask whether people are vulnerable and need access to that program. And for people who don't know, it just means that you're prioritised in cases of power outages and so forth, that your supply is supposed to be kept as a priority service. But of course that presupposes that people are able to self-identify on the way in and with that you come with compounded issues around understanding what that means and what that system is and how you can use it. Again, I don't know whether anyone else can speak to that more directly, but I think it's yeah, it's the same as most things. It's great in theory, but we're not necessarily nailing it in practise.

**Jax:** And I think particularly for people on the NDIS, they might require ventilators and stuff that they've been knocked back to have generators funded in the event that there's electricity outages and they need to have that life-saving equipment continue to run, that the NDIS has said no, we're not going to fund that, you need to self-fund that and they said, well, it's particularly related to my disability, it's a disability related support directly, why is it not included?

**Heather:** Yeah, and once again they use the ‘what if’

**Jax:** Yeah, yeah, exactly

**Host:** As we start to get to the end of our workshop time, I just wanted to hand it back over to you three, if you have any advice for everyone here, what they can do next, where they can go next, any groups or any resources that are out there or who we should all be going to speak to you, so yeah some tips or your own takeaway from the session today other than the plethora of ones you have already shared of course.

**Lefa:** For me, I think one of thewell, the key thing for mepersonally has been engagingwith disability groups and mostlythat is just peer to peer**.** There are many great disabilityorganisations doing lots of good workand who have lots of good resourcesbut the way that I tend to findthe ones that are most relevant to meis by being a part of a Facebook groupor an online chat room**.** So I have ME/CFS and the organisationdown here in Victoriafor me, ME/CFS is brilliantand they even have things like a registerof specialist doctors,not about ME/CFS, but for example,I needed to go see a sleep specialistand I found one that understood ME/CFSby going to the ME/CFS pageand they had a recommendation for sleepdoctors who are well educated in that areaand so I got the right kind of advicewhen I went to that doctor**.** So I think definitely,you know, looking at the statutory bodiesfor your own groups, but then also widelythe disabled communityare incredibly resourcefuland we pass alongyou know,oh I have a doctor who actually, you know,understood what I was comingfor, for this or,you know, these are the words I usedwith council that made them understandwhen I went to advocate for myselfor doing those sorts of things**.** So I'm always a huge advocatefor the fact thatthe disabled community are pretty goodat giving you what you need if you askand unfortunately, that does oftentake place in the spacesthat are online,which can be exclusionary to some peopleand one of the things that we knowabout disabled people is that we have lesssocial connections because we're less ableto engage in public spaces**.** So, yeah,I think anything that can encouragedisabled people to come togetherin the real world as well,I think libraries are really importantplace for thatprobably because I work thereand so I see the potential**.** But I do think, you know,they are one of the free spacesin communitiesthat you can come to and do that**.** So I think that, you know, even havingmeetups for people who can come intothat public space and share some of theirknowledge is a great idea as well**.** And obviously support workers and peoplewho are working in organisationsare often really goodat passing along that information toothey hear from their clientsand then pass it on to other clients.

**Host:** Thank you Lefa.

**Jax:** Yeah, I would, I would second that,find your way into some online spaces,try and have hybrid eventswhere you're still allowing peopleto connect in onlineif it doesn't feel accessibleor safe for them to come in person**.** And also think about diversityand intersectionality so don't just go into disability spacesand try and find people,go into CALD spaces, First Nationspaces, LGBTQI plus, find peoplethat are living with disabilityand also having those other identitiesand connecting with them and alsoshowing people with disabilitiesthat you're listening,that when we give feedbackor turn up to things or,you know, provide suggestionslike has happened today,what are the actions and outcomesthat are going to occurbecause we've had this great event so and,and, and being really public and openabout what that is to show people of, okay,these are the changes that we're making. These are the ways that you still can stayconnected and involvedto see some of this work continue,is really hearteningbecause often conversations happen,you know, events happen, and then we go,oh, what does that translate into?So I think,yeah, showing some of that stuff,so showing some of the actionorientated thingsis really important for community as well**.**

**Host:** Thanks Jax.

**Heather:** Yeah, look,I just support everything you've both saidand the importance of following throughwith what we've discussed today**.** Now one of the things I didjust want to sayand it's out the frontfor anyone who wants to get itbut this little bookletthat Dandenong was involvedwith many years ago is a bookletthat really talksabout any sort of emergency in your homeor in your community,and it is also available in videoon the Dandenong Council website**.** It's something that I think**,** it's, it's only in Englishbut the, because it's animatedand you know,in pictorial formit does get the message across**.** I've used it a lotwith the CALD communities that we'vespoken with and that found it helpful**.** So it's a little bookletthat brings it all together for all sortsof emergencies that you may faceand just helps you think about...But my, my main point todayis for people to think about thewhat ifs and plan for thembecause they will happen.And so it's somethingthat we all need to doregardless of, you know, our age in lifeor our stage in lifereally just thinking aboutwhat are we going to do if this happensand how are we going to keep ourselvessafe and alive.So I think that's, you know,one of the messages thatI would like to leavewith the group today.

**Host:** Thank you Heather.

**Voice over:** Thank you to our speakers Lefa Singleton Norton, Jax Jackie Brown and Heather Lawson. For more information visit greaterdandenong.vic.gov.au/sustainability