Podcast 105 - John Lui from Hear for You

Trudy Smith
Hello and welcome to this week's NextSense Institute podcast. My name is Trudy Smith and I am the host of the podcast today and manager of continuing professional education at the NextSense Institute. Its lovely to have you with us welcoming back an old friend, John Lui from Hear for You, John and his team have talked to us a number of times now, and it's always nice to have them back. But for those of you who may not have met John before, can you please introduce yourself to our audience?

John Lui
Hi, everybody. My name is John Lui. I'm the national manager of Hear for You and I came on board in 2013 as a mentor, before progressing to New South Wales state manager and of last year I have been National Manager of Hear for You and it's quite a special place to be. I'm profoundly deaf myself in both ears and had hearing aids since I was 10, and then a cochlear implant when I was 10, which is about 27 years ago.

Trudy Smith
It's great to have you with us, John. For those who don't know, can you please tell us a little bit about the work of Hear for You.

John Lui
And so Hear for You is basically a National Organisation which provides mentoring programs for deaf, or hard-of-hearing teenagers in high school. And so, all of our mentors are also deaf or hard of hearing themselves, which means we provide a unique point of difference in that deafness is removed as a point of difference in that room where everybody is deaf or hard of hearing themselves, if that makes sense?

Trudy Smith
Yeah, I think it's an important point to make that it's a support group for people who are deaf and hard of hearing by people who are deaf and hard of hearing. I think that is a very unique point of difference. And an important to note, Hear for You has recently integrated with the Shepherd Centre. Can you tell us a little bit about why this came about?

John Lui
Yeah. So we wanted to ensure the longevity of the organisation and because, you know, the funding landscape was becoming very, very difficult. Even pre-COVID it was becoming difficult. And even with the advice of the NDIS - it did help with keeping things sustainable. But we wanted to be part of a longer pathway. At the Shepherd Centre where they provide services from 0 years of age all the way to 18 plus window, while there are quite a few organisations in the hearing health industry that are doing important work, there's a lot of gaps in which people can fall through in their life's journey as a hard of hearing participant. To give you an example, if you graduate from the Shepherd Centre at the age of five years of age and there's basically nothing until Hear for You's primary or secondary aged sessions, which is when they are in year 6. And that's a gap of seven years, which means a whole lot of things can happen in those years. And so, we wanted to be part of a bigger picture in

itself and and the shepherd Centre was the perfect place to do it, given the history- the founder of Hear for You Olivia Anderson was a Shepherd Centre graduate herself and quite a few of our mentors and participants have come through the Shepherd Centre as well. And so there's a lot of overlap and collaboration with that area. And so that's why we looked at that integration with the Shepherd Centre and its been going really well.

Trudy Smith
Fantastic. I think that's a really important thing to note is that that we don't want to take away the safety net for these kids and I think recognising that those gaps existed is a really great place to start. I'm interested though. John, because the shepherd centre is an auditory verbal Therapy Clinic that provides support in listening and spoken language programs. What does this mean for the Hear for You programs that support Auslan using clients?

John Lui
Operationally there is no difference there because anybody who uses Auslan and wants to join our programs, they are most welcome to and we will provide interpreter access for those people. Some of our mentors are also learning Auslan themselves. Some are bilingual. Some are really, really open to the idea of learning Auslan. The main thing is that it's really important for us as organisations, not to claim that we are historically deaf culturally. Let me just repeat that. It's really important for people not to claim that we have that historical Deaf culture in our organisation because we don't. And so by historical Deaf culture, I'm talking about that because historical Deaf societies like the Deaf Society of New South Wales, now Deaf Connect and so we can't say that we have that same claim or connection with Deaf culture but they do because technology as we know has changed the landscape so much for Deaf and hard of hearing people. And so it's really important for us to be aware of that and to also let people know that if people use Auslan join our programs, we are more than happy to do so but we are not in the place where we can talk about Deaf culture and it would be just almost disrespectful of us to do that if that makes sense.

Trudy Smith
Absolutely. So I imagine some of that response is because of concerns raised by the deaf Community around that issue and it sounds like youve addressed that really well so thankyou very much for that. Moving on from that, I really want to talk about the programs of Hear for You. I just think you're such an important organisation for youth who are deaf and hard of hearing. So can you please tell us about some of the programs that are coming up.

John Lui
Because we have various programs but for example we have our main mentoring program which is our life goals and skills mentoring program which takes place from August to November- 1 session a month over four months and that's where our teenagers get together with our mentors and in their separate year groups like years seven and eight, nine and ten, eleven and twelve. They can talk about various life topics like careers relationships so they could see and also we talk about deaf specific issues like for example using the FM at school or lip reading people or accents. So we actually tackle everything in the room and so that's our main mentoring program and that program runs at various times throughout the year. We

have one day, fun workshops where teenagers can meet their peers and mentors in an informal environment without having to feel like they have to jump into these quite deep baskets of things that we call mentoring. And so there's our vast network of workshops. For example we have our drama Workshop, coming up in the July Holidays, we have online cooking. We have our filmmaking Workshop planned for later this year. So it's a really good opportunities for teenagers to come and meet one another and to sort of chill out and should be themselves. And so, in addition to that, we also have our life goals and skills blast workshop, which is our weekend version about mentoring program, where we actually go back to the regional cities by our team out there and they can mentor the teenagers from that local area. B we are very cognisant of the fact that even getting to our workshops on the weekend, could be tricky with familial commitments, or sporting commitments, or whether it's too hard in typical life for teenagers to go and start to talk about their own social problems to go and meet other people who might be deaf but they don't know them, they have no connection with them. And so to ask people from regional cities to come into the metro area for these mentoring programs and workshops is even bigger ask. So that's why we go back to the main regional cities.

Trudy Smith
Brilliant. I know that you've got the flagship program as you said, the life goals and skills and the Metro program and you've got one happening in Brisbane and it's four sessions over four months. What are the kinds of work that you do in those sessions John?

John Lui
It's a whole bunch of sort of things. I think the most important thing is to create that environment where teenagers can come and sort of realise that everybody else in the room is Deaf. So hopefully taking away some of that anxiety around having deafness as a barrier to connect to with other people. We also have a parent session in that program where parents of teenagers can get to know one another because it's also quite isolated, for parents as well who have some anxiety about whether they are they're doing the right thing or not by their child. So for them to find like minded parents is really important and also it's an opportunity for them to connect because some their teenagers may have gone through the early intervention programs when they were three or four years old and not seen them again for another 10 years. With our mentors themselves we do a whole heap of things we do aspirational activities, we do life skills planning. When you ask them about, hey you know, what do you want to do with your future? And you know, this is not a deaf thing, its a teenager thing. And so teenagers is sort of like: Yeah, I have no idea. And so we're really asking them to consider something that's really big. So often a lot of things that we do, it's about life itself with a layer of deafness or hearing loss on top of that. And so that's one big thing that we really try to help our teenagers and parents to actually see it's about life first. He was a teenager first but then you've got the layer of hearing loss on top through which you have to navigate life, if that makes sense?

Trudy Smith
It does, it absolutely makes sense. But I wonder John if part of the... I mean all teenagers are never sure what they want to do for a career. And for their futures- is some of the advice that your mentors give even things about because you're deaf, these are, these are still- your dreams and goals are still realistic. These are, these

are still- if someone was wanting to a particular career, but they're not sure they're going to be able to because of their hearing loss. Are they the kind of conversations that your mentors also support?

John Lui
Yeah. Totally. Like for example, you know, we never want to try, and we always want to encourage everybody's dreams. And we never want to shut down somebody's dreams say, oh, you'll never be an astronaut or you'll never be a pilot because that's not to say, they can't work in the Air Force or they can't work in an airport or they can't work in, you know, NASA. It just may be that that one specific job they may be unable to do, because of hearing requirements. But, you know, with the advent and progression of technology who knows? Perhaps they will be able to in the future because of the progresses in technology accessibility. Who knows? But we want to encourage them from the point that -look, what are your goals and dreams? Don't discount it just because you're deaf or have a hearing loss. Explore it first. Look into it, plan for it and then go at it later on. If your plans and goals, and dreams change, that's okay. I think the important part is start to dream first.

Trudy Smith
Absolutely, I think that's really powerful. And I know that there will be people listening, who are wanting to engage either their own children or if they're a practitioner to engage their clients in your program. What's the best way to get in touch with you now John?

John Lui
Anybody can contact me via my email address which is John.Lui@shepherdcentre.org.au

Trudy Smith
Great and we will put that in the show notes and a link to the website too so that people can find out more about you and I know you've got fantastic mailing list so I really encourage people to subscribe- it just keeps you updated with all of the really fantastic programs that are available with your group. John thank you as always for making time to come and talk to me. I think it's such a valuable program that you provide. I know several teenagers who've been engaged and all the stronger and more centered for it. So thank you for the work that you and your team do. And thank you so much for joining me today.

John Lui
Thank you for the opportunity Trudy, its always a pleasure.