

Student Experience Podcast

S3 E3 Sam Jacob

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SPEAKERS

Tanya R, Sam Jacob

Tanya R 00:00

Welcome to this episode of the student experience podcast. Today, I'm joined by Sam Jacob. Sam brings more than 30 years experience in higher education across both the UK and Australia, including senior roles at the Laureat international universities at Deakin University Monash University, University of South Australia, the University of Adelaide and Sam's current role is the pro Vice Chancellor of student engagement and success at Charles Darwin uni. Sam is leading a team of eight, sorry, staff across eight campuses, so a lot more than eight. They're responsible for transition and retention, Library and Learning Support contact center management, Student Academic admin, student systems counseling, access, inclusion and career employability. So I'm feeling like that's almost everything except the actual teaching element. Sam is a specialist in the Student Services area with a particular strengths in conceptualizing the future needs of organizations of driving change, implementing innovative and responsive strategies, improving quality and managing information and communication technologies. When Sam was at Laureat, focused on improving employment outcomes for students, they launched a major success coaching initiative for all students in partnership with Gallup. Now at CDU, Sam has joined a young innovative University, focusing on making a difference to the remarkable desert region and tropical top end of Australia and unfortunately scenario I have been to yet but definitely on my to do list. And Charlestown also has a very big focus on its national and international neighbors. Glad to be in a dual sector University, Sam is driving a transformational change program to improve student outcomes, especially for students in equity groups, which we're going to talk a bit more about today. Sam holds postgraduate qualifications in management, mediation and arbitration, and occasionally is crazy enough to contemplate a PhD. They have been active in the sector for a long time working toward safer cabs, communities, improving customer journeys, and also leading major retention initiatives, and of course presenting papers at national and international conferences. Sam is a fellow for the Association of tertiary education management is currently mentoring other Darwin based professionals in the Northern Territory, governments, women and leadership program. Sam has served on a number of community boards, including as Deputy Chair of Melvin's midsummer festival,

the chair of Adelaide space festival, and also currently volunteering with the clinical foundation. I feel exhausted Sam, welcome.

Sam Jacob 03:02

Nice to be here. lovely to be here. Thanks for the opportunity to chat.

Tanya R 03:06

Oh, absolute pleasure, So to start with if we can first focus on the work that you do improving opportunities for our LGBT IQ students through the Pinnacle foundation. And also I know you've done recent pride and diversity training, can you share with us your insights on what's needed, perhaps also what needs to change to ensure that we are providing a safe, supportive and respectful learning experience, particularly for LGBTIQ students, and also as a result, all students

Sam Jacob 03:39

say it's a hot topic. And, and I have a lot to say. So let's see how far we get through this. I've, I love the way that the pinnacle foundation does, and I have been volunteering with them for a number of years now. And actually, I applied to be a mentor. So Pinnacle provides both a scholarship and a mentor to young LGBTQ plus students. And often the power of Pinnacle really comes to bear through the mentorship rather than through the financial support. Its students perceive it to be the other way around. But the mentors are very powerful in the in the career development and learning journey for those students. And so I thought I would, I would volunteer to be a mentor, and instead, Pinnacle decided that they needed some help selecting the scholars every year. So the pinnacle folk wrote back to me and said, We note your interest in being a mentor, but will you come and help with our scholar selection process? And I said, Yes, of course. And so I now chair that scholar selection committee, we have local and national processes to find the best young queer people every year. And as a result, I read about somewhere between four and 500 applications every year from Young people who are either still in year 12, or have just started at uni. Some of them in undergrad or post grad, some of them are TAFE. And I get to read their applications, which includes information about their career aspirations, their goals, their ambitions, how they want to change the world. And also information about the impact of their marginalized sexuality or gender identity, and the impact that's had on their studies, but also on their life in general. And it's a very moving and sometimes disheartening process, because I think there's a sense from people that, you know, we've moved on a long way, we're in a progressive country, we've got marriage equality, like what else is there really like? Aren't we there yet? And what these young people say in their masters every year to me is no, we're not there yet. Yeah. And, you know, I read stories about people in a same sex school who transition in year 11, year 12, and the impact that has on them attaining and kind of ATAR, that will get them into a course that will set them up for a career for life. And that's a scenario that I think a lot of people don't think about, I read stories from applicants who, you know, are already at uni or doing a course that they love, maybe are going through a process of affirming their gender. And then they they have to reverse that to do a work placement. Because as part of their cause, they have to go into our workplace. And they're not sure whether that workplace will be accommodating of their gender presentation. And so they have to straighten their gender in order to participate in their placement which is required for their course. And these are heartbreaking stories about people needing to put pieces of themselves away, in order to cope in a system that doesn't accommodate them. So it's been a remarkable process for me to learn about how

far away from progress it really feels for these folks. I mean, maybe if you live in inner city, Sydney or Melbourne, that's not quite the case. But I would say it's also given me a real sense of what happens when you intersect an LGBTQ identity with other facets of identity. And so for those students who are also indigenous, or who were also from a Muslim background, or from a Jewish background, or another faith based culture that has strong opinions around gender, or sexuality, or if you're from a, you know, you grew up in a place in regional or remote Australia, where you felt really isolated and where there weren't great services around and you didn't see other people like you, and you feel like you're the odd one out. And that risk of that social isolation and what that does for people's sense of health and well being, or perhaps, you know, you might understand your gender in a more complex or nuanced way. I went to a show last night and the part of the Dow and festival and they they welcomed ladies, gentlemen, and those with genders and forcing, which I thought was a lovely expression. Those of us with genders unforeseen. You know, maybe, maybe we have occupations where that's, that's harder to present. So, you know, maybe that's okay, if you're in a, you know, a groove, a young tech company that has great policies around gender. But if you if you're in an occupation, where gender roles are very strongly held, and then that might be more challenging. And so understanding, I guess, the intersections of identity and the impact that can have on somebody's ability to understand themselves, seek support, find social connection, see themselves in the world see themselves in their career path. And, and so I've been honored really to be a part of that. And to see that, that the work that particularly the mentoring and the work that that does for somebody whose sense of self. And so if you can see somebody like like yourself, and see them progress and see them succeed, and you know, you're not the only young queer person who wants to be a human rights lawyer, or you're not the only young queer person who wants to be a doctor in our region or remote area, and we hook you up with mentors who are further ahead of their career, the new hour, that really changes people's sense of the possibilities that are open to them. So powerful, it's very painful, and it's very exciting work to be a part of, and it has shown me how much I have to learn. So, you know, I do identify as a queer person and I have been involved in queer politics and queer communities and queer arts for a really long time. And I have a heat to learn from 19 and 20 year olds who are applying to Nicole, and giving me a schooling in terms of what it's like, what their what their lived experience is of their gender and or their sexuality. And I think that's one of the things I really learned through the pride in diversity training is that it even if you know some things, you can't know everything. And so actually, rather than it being traditional linear educative process, some of this is about unlearning. And unknowing, and remembering that the lived experience of people is the greatest teacher. And so you probably hold as I do, myths and assumptions about all sorts of things to do with queerness gender and sexuality. But when you listen to people's lived experience, you really draw on a really rich volume of data and information that that person can contribute to. And so my job is to remember that I don't know, rather than to do no. And I think that relieves a lot of pressure. Because some of my colleagues say to me, like, what if I get it wrong? And I'm like, well, that's pretty much guaranteed, right? Because I get things from still. And if I get things wrong, you're going to get things wrong, too. But let's try, let's, let's try and keep up to date with some of the new language let's try and, you know, show people that we're listening and learning, let's not try and show people that we're experts, or that we know, but let's show people that we care that we have compassion, that we're interested in individual people's experience, and that we have things to learn from everybody. And so that pride in diversity training was a great opportunity for me to, to move, I guess, see a bunch of people move from being well meaning to being well informed. That's the transformation that happens in that training. And, and, and for people to ever be

comfortable in a space of Unknowing. Yeah. And so that's, that's, you know, I guess it's like a, maybe a traditional learning curve, where the first thing you realize is how much you don't know. And everybody feels a bit uncomfortable about that. But some of us in that training were members of the LGBTQ community, and other people weren't. And we all got to learn something from each other. And people were comfortable to share pieces of their own lived experience. And that really enriched the training that the pride and diversity trainers could provide. And it's, it's great actually to have an organization that's putting the labor of that education in commercial hands. Sometimes as queer people, we get asked to do a lot of labor around queerness, and inclusion for free, for free. And so I recommend looking at the commercial options, because I think it's great for people to be paid for their time and effort and expertise. And pride and diversity is just one organization that's doing that.

Tanya R 12:53

Yeah, I did. Earlier this year. I've been doing my feminist coach training, which has been, as you say, it's a complete unlearning process, and like relearning all the things that you had no idea about, because it's so out of your own personal experience range. And yeah, it's just, it is powerful to then be able to bring that into everything that you're doing. And as you say, it's okay to not be the expert.

Sam Jacob 13:29

And I think people like people can really respect the good hearted nature of people who are making an effort and are very forgiving, actually, of people who get something's wrong, because there's no, there's often no consensus of opinion on that, like some people will tell you, they prefer this language to be used. And other people will say they don't like that language. So the word queer is a perfect example. I love the word queer, I use it a lot, I use it to describe myself, I use it as a sort of umbrella term, when saying, all the different pieces of the acronym wears me down. Other people really hate that they hate being aggregated to the hate the loss of those individual identities, and they hate the loss of the differences that that acronym represents for them, and that those different letters of the alphabet are there for a reason. And they represent something quite different from the letter next to them, or the letter next to that. And particularly people from an older generation might have lived experience of that word being used in really terrible ways against the candidate. And so they're there often isn't actually a right answer. There's just layers of understanding about how nuanced languages and we feel pretty comfortable with language being nuanced about a whole lot of other things. I think we have to get comfortable with language around gender and sexuality being just as nuanced. Yeah.

Tanya R 14:54

I think that also goes when we're talking about Indigenous women. Indigenous people and our Indigenous students, because you know, for some areas that they identify as indigenous, some might be preparing First Nation, some might be Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander, some prefers to be known as Black. So it is flexible then. And I think aware that not everyone's gonna like the way that I'm doing it or you're doing it, but we, you know, at least being open to the idea that people like things in different ways. And that's okay.

Sam Jacob 15:30

Yeah, I learned something the other day, I thought it was really interesting. So we often talk about acknowledging country, or a Welcome to Country. And so the word country has a particular meaning

that is smaller than the geography of Australian. And so I listened to somebody talk about Australia as the continent, and the land is the country. And it really changed my thinking around like, how often do I use country as Australia, but still country as this sort of smaller piece that the predating colonization piece? And so can I start to use continent when I mean, all of Australia and country when I mean, the land is understood, and by local mind, and I think it's great to get that schooling. And it's great to sort of understand how language changes framing, and it really has helped me understand how important it is to protect language. Because for some folk, you know, for some languages, there are cases of that language that represent a framing or a lens that actually just doesn't exist in a different language. And without protecting the language, you don't protect the thinking. You don't protect the culture, the philosophy, the approach, because the language and shrines that in a way that cannot be translated. So I love how many language speakers there are up here in the territory, I came to the territory to Get Schooled. And I'm, and I'm privileged to get access to that out here. It's remarkable. It's a remarkable place, both the desert and the tropics. And I love both. And there's there's vibrant, strong, rich, generous, resilient communities of people up here, who are willing to give me a schooling and say, Thank you.

Tanya R 17:25

have to say, I'm equally blessed here. I'm on Dharumbal country. And I have some really good friends in the Dharumbal community. And it's just, it's so different from my growing up in Victoria. where it was, it was so separated, and yet learning so much more about what you can and can't do. And, and, and how different things affect people. Yeah, we're very blessed. Yeah. I guess. So. My next question is sort of, I guess, stepping away from from this a little bit and more into Charles Darwin uni, itself, it's getting a reputation as a rising star, taking pride in approaching things differently. For some, as someone as yourself, who's previously introduced a success coaching program at Laura International, and is actively working towards a safer and more inclusive campus communities. I really came to learn more about this ambitious student experience Transformation Program that you and your team have been developing, I able to share any insights into your approach or what's to come without no breaching protocol or anything like that preview,

Sam Jacob 18:48

we like preview, please. I'm a chronic oversharer. So that's a good. I love that. I guess one of the things that I that I knew when I came here is that you can't transplant solutions from other places and just hope they work. And I think in my career today, that has been very possible because, you know, any move from one university in an urban metropolitan area to another university in urban metropolitan area with similar cohorts of students, some of the same things really work. And so you know, there's ready sharing of ideas across the sector, and it's a bit swings and roundabouts, somebody tries this, and somebody tries the opposite, and then really changes. But you've got a toolkit of things that have got quite high likelihood of success in your institution if they've been successful in another institution. And one of the things that really attracted me to coming up here was because the context is so different. And so can you really transplant an urban solution? Or a metropolitan university solution into CDU? And will that work and I think the answer is clear. competitive as I imagined it would be. And so the answer is all sorts of yeses and noes. And I'm reminded of a great colleague of mine, and that I worked with at laureate, Chris Hill, who used to always say, to me, context is king. And I think that's, that's really a clickable up here. So, you know, there's something different about the territory, it's an enormous

geography with a tiny population, and very vibrant frontier spirit. And a huge, huge proportion of the population are First Nations people. And that, that's an incredible landscape to work in, and you can't help but get the power of this place in space. So everywhere you go, whether you're in desert landscape, or in tropical landscape, everywhere you go, you're you're conscious of the power of place. Either because you are so hard, and you think no human being in the planet has ever been, than you are right now. Or because it's so beautiful, and the landscape is so dramatic and so magnificent, and, and the seasons are wild, and the weather is ferocious and and, and so you're in the rhythm of the natural world. And, and I've really understood how a lot of First Nations communities understand that connection to country and that they are country, it's not a connection to a separate thing called country, by our country, they are in and of the landscape and, and in and of the natural world, and taking care of country is taken care of community because country is community. And so you get that you can't work in the Northern Territory without starting to understand some of those things. And, and as a dual sector institution, we have, you know, certificate one all the way through to PhDs, we also have a pretty unique opportunity to have a great footprint across the territory and to meet the needs of the territory's learners at a whole loads of different stages in their lives, and also with a whole lot of different career ambitions or aspirations. And I think it's a really great place to undo this notion that that serves higher ed. So it's a dual sector institution, where that stands in and of itself in its own right in its own fabulous outcomes, without needing to serve as a pathway to higher ed. Right. And I think in other jewel sector institutions event is really seen as a feeder halfway Yeah, and empowered way. And, and I think, I'm glad that we don't have that, you know, that, that have used to hire it, we have, you know, that is a beautiful and valuable product in its own right. And for a lot of industries or professions. The degree is not the right qualification. And so maybe it's a vet qualification, and then a proscribed qualification, and it's, it's maybe not an undergrad, and so understanding the place that I'm in and understanding the landscape of the qualifications that we deliver and the purpose that they serve, you know, we have trainers who go out on cattle stations and sleeping and swag, and teach station hands had at all, you know, those folk, like on a pathway to higher into those on the pathway to working in cattle sections, like that's their gig, and, and, and they're doing a fabulous job. And then also, I guess, understanding so I understand the place I'm in now I understand the products that we're delivering. And then I'm also starting to understand the cohorts that we service. And, you know, CTU has, its relatively small in the sector, with ambitious plans to maybe disrupt that a little. But we have, we have a lot of Australian First Nation students, which is really fabulous. Last year 21% of all of our best students were indigenous, and about seven or 8% of our higher ed students. That's probably higher than most other providers in the country. And and we've got bold plans for that to grow even more, so that we become more on parity with the NT population as a whole which is at 30% 90% 96% of our higher ed intake, and not school leavers. And again, that would be one of the smallest proportion of school leavers in the country. So we really play very strongly in the mature age market. About 80% of our higher ed students choose to study online and if they can, that they might be doing some some blogs offline for workshops. But they choose to be online when they can. And, and only about half of our higher ed students are in the territory and about half that elsewhere. So, in fact, they're almost all in the territory. But in higher ed, it's about half and half. And when they're not in a territory, they're all over the place. So we have we attract students from other regional or rural areas, as well as from the city populations. And we have a campus in Sydney, which is growing. And we have campuses all over the territory, campuses and study centers. So we're not the University of Darwin, where the university and for and in the Northern Territory with a reach that goes well beyond there. So all of that put together gives me a very unique context in which to

apply solutions. And some of the things that might have worked in other places I don't think would work up here, or we've tried them and they haven't worked. Some of the things that work up here might not work in other places. And so remembering that context is king. And we're really dealing with a student population that has low study muscle memory. It's not low skill, and it's not low capability. And it's certainly not low potential, but they don't have a study muscle memory, perhaps from recent study experience, or, you know, experience elsewhere. And so it's made us realize how much or how urgent it is to codify tacit knowledge about studying. Because we know like everywhere else, if you if you don't come and succeed, your risk of attrition is very high. And what I want is for students to succeed and progress and attain and complete and be fabulous, you know, I'm I'm 49 years old and too old to change the world single handedly. But I can graduate cohorts and cohorts of students from asset one all the way through to a PhD, who off out changing their own worlds,

Tanya R 27:04

I have to think I have to acknowledge that given that your student cohorts are traditionally those that are more at risk of attracting your attrition rate is not as high as what you would expect. So obviously, even though you've got these high risk cohorts, you're managing it really well, for that, like compared to other universities.

Sam Jacob 27:29

Yeah, and I think I think that's, that's true. Also, we see disparate success rates to different equity groups in a way that that I handled heart wouldn't want to see. So we are sharing some of the same challenges as as colleagues elsewhere in the sector. But we're also doing really well at something so that if I look, for example, at the completion, the unit completion rate in vocational training for First Nation students, compared to students who are not First Nations, they're almost comparable, we're almost at parity, which is a fabulous outcome and a testament to the amazing training that they provide here. We're not we're not as close in higher ed. So we have worked in higher ed. But it's work I'm excited about and work that there are fabulous First Nations staff, volunteers, adjuncts, research fellows, fabulous people are here to work with to understand how to tackle that work in culturally appropriate and culturally safe ways that are actually going to work. So one of the things that I love about this place is that people are like, very ready to co design. And, and, you know, it's not a population of 18 and 19 year old students straight out from school who have limited experience, people here have a rich background students and staff that have existing strengths and talents. They have existing bodies of work in terms of their, their place in the community, or their place in the workforce. And so co designing with students out here is fun and fabulous, because they know like they know heaps of stuff they know more than I do about what the student experience at CTU is like, and so I think we've really been able to have have our best results when we hand over their sense that we are a service provider and they are a recipient. And instead we we understand the shared goal we have around student success. And we involve students in designing solutions that will really work for them. So co design is a pillar of our our approach up here and we're lucky to have a population that's contributes in really impressive ways. And

Tanya R 29:46

it also comes back to like what we're talking about before where, whilst we may be experts in some elements, you know, we're all we're not experts in the students, they're expressing themselves. So if they're able to bring their expertise Have you seen as amazing how much more we can create?

Sam Jacob 30:04

Yeah, that's right. And I think, you know, where we're learning to apply multiple cultural lenses to the work that we do. So if you want to hit multiple audiences, I was talking to one of my team this morning about changing our changing our focus from input to outcomes. So this is not about what we, what we lay on the table. This is about the impact of what we lay on the table has on the population. And so we've just drafted a new student code of conduct, it's got beautiful words, it talks about respect and integrity and inclusion and belonging. And, you know, it's all the things you would want from a student community. But that's not the work, the work isn't the code of conduct. The work is how we apply multiple cultural lenses to bring that to life with different groups of students, with queer students, with First Nation students, with students with a disability, with students from offshore countries who have come to Australia for the first time through senior year study. And so how do we stop expecting people to read our code? And how do we start doing the work that we're doing in a way that reaches those different cultural communities, in language they understand in a framing that's understood in a way that's relevant, and that will never say to you, that will never be one way. It will never there will never be one way of bringing a student code of conduct to life, right? Where's the Creole version for our big rivers community down in Catherine? You know, where's the young new version for all the folk who live and work around northern boy and other areas and Eastern lands? And, you know, where's where's Student Conduct brought to life by Nepalese community? And how do we make reference to, you know, Nepalese cultural traditions in understanding conduct? So, that that's fabulous, right, that's a fabulous, kind of integrated, diverse, challenging environmental work in and such opportunity for everybody to learn. And if we do something that really works for the Nepalese community, and suddenly the Creole community, you're like, wow, I get that, right. Because my culture is a bit like that culture. And suddenly, you have these, like connections that don't require whiteness, to be at the center of everything, for Anglo approaches, or Western approaches, to be at the center of everything. And for everybody else to translate through that. Instead, you get Creole Nepalese connections, or you get, y'all knew I would be making it up, you get these connections that don't rely on us as a point of translation. Yeah. And that that's magic. That's magic. And that's actually releasing, you know, the power of change to the people in the community, rather than having a locus of control. So I care about quality, and I care about outcomes. And I'm trying to achieve that up here in ways that are less about control. And I'm more about my learning.

Tanya R 33:17

And I love that approach. I think that's so powerful. And I think it's, it's proof that it can be done, because quite often, it's like, oh, it's too hard. Or we're just, you know, we've got it here and everyone and it's like, it's not hard. It's about letting go. It's about being open. And as you say, not being the white Anglo centric version, but actually say more, what is what is the best stuff that's out there?

Sam Jacob 33:48

Yeah. Yeah. Like, what if we reinvented graduations that had a nod to the rich history and cultural tradition of Western Anglo higher education, but also had a nod to how, how ritual works in other

cultures and other places in other traditions? And what if we were always seeking to represent multiple lenses and multiple views? Not because we're trying to undo the ritual, but because we're trying to find ritual in more than one place? How exciting. It's really, it's really exciting. Now. Don't email me and say, like, give us your roadmap, because it won't work for somewhere else. But the approach might work. Yeah, the my thing. Yeah, that's right. And, and I, you know, I'm reminded I was looking at, you know, I don't want to miss the opportunity to talk about really practical things that the queers do. Students in particular make a real difference at university because I think we've lost in Australia, a bit of that. Not a checklist, but a kind of framing. For people who are passionate about making their institutions more inclusive, we've lost a bit of momentum around what that might look like. And there's really great samples in the US and in Canada. And so I want to mention some of those things. But I was thinking about the impact of leaders. I work for Vice Chancellor now. And we have a new VC has been here, not very long. And they're very fabulous and quite well known Scott Bowman. And I, you know, I've worked with lots of different vice chancellors, some of which I think are fabulous, and some of which I didn't think we're fabulous. And, and it's with Scott, Scott is not particularly knowledgeable about queer students. Scott is not particularly knowledgeable about gender, gender identities or sexualities. But you know what, it doesn't matter, because, because what Scott is passionate about is inclusion and belonging, and moving an institution beyond acceptance into real, real, tangible inclusion. And so when I said to Scott, in his first two weeks, we've never really acknowledged by the hobbit day, International Day against homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and intersex ism, I've got that in the wrong order. We've never really acknowledged that, like, I've been here a while, and people have been here for much longer than me, and it sort of doesn't ever get a marker in the calendar of community, you know, the university community. That was like, tell me what to tell me what you need me to do. And I'm there. And, and, and it's not having a leader who says, I know what we need to do, we're going to do X, it's having a leader who says, tell me what, tell me, tell me what you need. And I'm there for you, Sam. And so, you know, we raised inclusive rainbow flag. And, you know, we launched an ally network, we have 90 members of staff now at CTU, who are active members of an ally network, we launched a joint student and staff pride group. We had orientation this week, ready for semester, two and six months, students signed up for the pride group. And so it's the capacity of a leader to really set the tone in an organization that can change the ways in which people within that organization can act with power and purpose to make changes. So I don't need Scott to drive the agenda. But he somehow manages to unlock that the agenda being driven from within the organization. And that's a very powerful lesson in leadership.

Tanya R 37:43

Yes, yes, I think I'm also one of Scott's strengths is he listens to the students as well.

Sam Jacob 37:51

Yeah, yeah. Which is great. Like, like, if you don't know what students think get up and move, get up out of your office, get off your seat, go, go hang out, go, pop into a lecture, pop into a workshop, pop into the trades, training sheds, go down to the kitchens down at the Palmerston campus, hang out in Alice Springs library for a while and talk to people and ask them and you know, you, you've always got to balance the story of one with the experience of many. But the more of those ones you can collect in terms of listening to stories, the more you will really understand what your institution is or isn't achieving. You know, we have a pretty aggressive roadmap around inclusion. And this is a this is not

the easiest places to do that the Northern Territory is not known for being progressive and inclusive. For queer people, for example, it's not the cultural hub of queer Australia. But you know what, there's amazing people here doing great work. The indigenous scene up here is plenty queer. And the queer scene up here is plenty indigenous. And that's a really beautiful intersection that you don't necessarily get in other places and individual people and making that happen. There are some some real rock stars up here making that happen. And I love you know, we have ambition around gaining a rainbow take accreditation. So that's a process run by an organization based in Victoria. They have six standards around LGBTQ inclusive practice. And as an organization, you can go through a process of accreditation, and see whether or not you can get rainbow tick accredited. And the Northern Territory aids and hepatitis council just received robotic accreditation, which is amazing. The first in the Northern Territory, and I really want us to be the second we're not ready yet. I wouldn't. It's on my roadmap, but it's maybe two or three years away because we have a lot of work to do. Internally first, but but we're starting that work and I was thinking, this conversation with you prompted me to think about what are some of the practical things that people could be doing who are passionate about this? And so what are what I think of as green flags, we'll talk about red flags, right? That's a red flag, red flag, one of the green flags, and, and particularly in the eyes of our students. So if I was a, you know, young genderqueer student, or a student who had just transitioned or if I, you know, if my sexuality was was lesbian or gay, or bisexual or queer, what would the green flags be for me when I was looking at an institution and, and it's some of these things, it's, it's that there is an ally network. And so there, there is a there is the active fostering of an ally community within the organization, maybe staff and students, and visibly identify people who are safe points of contact and and who stand up and say, I am an ally to you. That's a really powerful green flag, and social spaces online and on campus. But for queer students, that's really important in our new City Campus in in Darwin CBD, we've we've built in a queer students space, so students will have access to that space. There's also a space for Indigenous students, and a space for them. And so some folks might have access to all three pride groups. So obviously, you know, if you're on the current students website, and you're looking at the student groups, is there a pride group? Is there somewhere where I can make social connections with other students? And does the university celebrate important days in the queer calendar? So did they celebrate either? How big are they doing? Wear it purple? Are they doing the Transgender Day of Remembrance? Are they doing something for whatever that locations pride festival? Or, you know, whether it's as big as Mardi Gras midsummer, or whether it's Catherine pride, which is a fabulous local regional event? Is the university doing something in on that cultural calendar? Will there be toilets I can use comfortably and safely? And does the university promote that when I look at Campus maps doesn't give me any information about that other facilities team on board with providing appropriate bathroom facilities for everybody in the community. I have a bit of a bee in my bonnet about queer students not being kind of recognized that putting group in the Australian landscape. And so often there aren't programs targeted towards queer students, despite the marginalization and discrimination that we face. But are there other sort of bursary or support programs? So are there scholarships? Or are there you know, mentors? Or are there you know, particular support programs that identify that queer students often have had challenging times accessing education and succeeding to date? Does anybody in the careers team understand what it's like to be a gender non conforming person and need a placement? What about a placement in a primary school? How would that guy so you know, what's your careers teams approach to betting placements or internships, to making sure that that we don't just create a safe and inclusive environment here, but that we understand that when we send you out into workplaces, as a compulsory

part of your course, that we have some responsibility to make sure that's safe and inclusive for you, too? And then can I see visibly queer, LGBTQ, plus people in decision making walls, whether that's students or staff in leadership roles? Can I see people like me in this institution? Can I see me in curriculum? Can I see me and assessment? Are my relationships represented? Is my body represented? So if I'm in a health science course, is everything binome? What are the gender nonconforming folk get? You know, a good an equal measure of representation? Can I find me in what I'm studying? Am I there in the language? Am I there in that in the form and and i think where we can't fix everything, right, we can't fix every employer that a student might go to find placement. We can't fix every school that they might do a, you know, module and we can't fix every place everywhere all at once. But where we know we can't fix it? Do we recognize the risk that that presents to somebody, safety and sense of self and have we done something to mitigate that risk? So if your pronoun and your name is different than it is legally, I can't process a student loan for You in your current name, I'm going to have to use your legal name because it's a legal process. But have I at least recognized that that presents a point of risk of for your health and safety and well being? And have I done something to mitigate that risk? by at least acknowledging that it exists? And so where we can't be in a position to fix everything? can we can we make sure that we acknowledge the risk of some things and help folk through that in a way that doesn't harm them?

Tanya R 45:29

And even just acknowledging that, that it is a problem? because quite often, I think we get caught up in following a form and it's just, okay, well, are you this, this or this? And it's like, well, what if I'm none of them? It's like, well, you have to be one of them. Because he had three options. And I can only do three options.

Sam Jacob 45:47

And I can't do that. Let me go on. No, no. And let's get beyond the word other, you know, as a sort of catch all. So even little things like, if if on a form, you've got a binary option, it's x or y or other, then then change the word other to self defined, because it's much more positive language than the other ring of the word. They're really little things like, okay, maybe there does have to be an option. And you do have to fill a form in and it does have to be collected, and it's government data, but even some of the nomenclature that we could put around that can really change a person's perception of how much we know and understand their lived experience and what's happening. And then the other thing I would say is fill queerness into all your other campaigns. So if you're doing a heap of work around First Nations, don't forget sister girls and brother boys and other queer indigenous people, if you're doing the whole workflow to work around respect now always in the National Student safety survey that's coming up. What about what about same sex relationships in the context of violence that can happen in there and I use treating that issue sensitively and inclusively? What about the work that you're doing in a campus housing? on campus housing? How are you treating queerness in the context of on campus housing? And so, yeah, I guess just having that lens through the other things that you're doing around great practice, and making sure that you haven't forgotten that gender diverse folk are accessing all of your other services, too. Yeah, that's great.

Tanya R 47:25

Um, and I know we've we've had this has been really long. Well, the one other thing, I think, and I think you've covered a fair bit of this and what you've already spoken about, but was really about the insights that you can share about the changing student experience and how we can evolve as an industry to better meet the needs of our students both now and in the future.

Sam Jacob 47:48

It's such a good question, and super important. I mean, I think, I think perhaps I would just leave people with this one thought, how do we change from? How do we move? How do we transition from ways in which our solutions are based around the student to solutions that are based around the system? So equity students are not a problem. They're not challenging. They're not a deficit. The system works differently for people from different cultural and other lens backgrounds. And that's not their fault. That's our fault. And so how do we move our approaches to inclusion and success and retention and progression? And all those great outcomes that we work on all the time? How do we make sure that our interventions include changing the system, not the person, because you know what, the person's already fabulous? The person is already fabulous. And so what about my institution doesn't work for that person? And why what systems can I change? How can I take my funding focus, and at least a part put it to change in the system? That's, I think, my next challenge,

Tanya R 49:14

and I, you know, that's that sort of decolonization because it doesn't matter whether, you know, we're talking about gender identity or race, but that colonized version is so very white. It's very Christian oriented, it's it's all that sort of thing, and it excludes everyone.

Sam Jacob 49:34

Yeah, it puts something at the center. Yeah. Everybody else at varying degrees away from the center. Like I've spent my whole life living a really long way from the center. I think the centers overblown, to be honest, and I find great power from living in the corner. And you know, I, I love my marginal life, and I, you know, if I, if I can show our the younger queer people that There's great power to be having in the margins and freedom in operating outside of that, you know, but not everybody has that experience. And I have a lot of privilege. Like, I'm, I'm white, I don't have to deal with racism on top of everything else. And so, you know, I say that I love the margins, acknowledging the privilege that I hold, I, I don't have a disability, I'm a white person. And so my marginal life comes with a lot of privilege still. But yeah, we still have this sense that there is a, there's a best possible thing to be and then less than best in degrees away from that. And I think, tackling that, for me, is the next frontier in Student Services, because our students are much more diverse than that thinking. And, and if we really want to support students to succeed, we have to change. And, and don't don't let any of us go out with any kind of messaging that says, You're a deficit. We're a deficit we have.

Tanya R 51:05

And I think that comes back to, you know, being the best we can as it, you know, as a whole nation or a continent. You know, we need everyone. And if we're not including so many people, we're missing out on so much. Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's all the questions I had. Was there anything else you wanted to add? Before we wrap up, Sam, I

Sam Jacob 51:32

think I've said everything I can think of. I mean, I think some of the other things we're doing up here, which I love is working more strongly with community groups. So with n talk with the melaleuca, which is the migrant Resource Center. So we have, because because it's a smaller place, and then the real benefit of that is that everybody knows somebody, you know, somebody. And there's lots of shared goals. We have lots of shared goals. And so I've worked in other institutions, I've worked in shoes my whole life. I've worked in universities, my whole life. And I, I feel like they have been much more insular than they are up here. And CDE wants to be king of connection. And so how do we make sure that we put our you know, tear down the fences and join hands with the right kinds of people? It's been the other gift of being up here. I think. I highly recommend the territory, everybody should come.

Tanya R 52:28

Every time I talk to someone up there, I just get more and more excited that when we're allowed to travel somewhere. Our own backyard. You know, we're very blessed here. Being regional, but so many people I think they miss out. So thank you so much for today. Sam, it's been an absolute pleasure. Speaking with you and I know I learned so much as well. If anyone wants to get in contact with you. I'll make sure that we provide some contact details in the podcast, comment section. And again, just thank you so much for joining us. It's been great.

Sam Jacob 53:17

Thanks.