

Trudy Smith:

Hello, and welcome to this special episode of the Next Sense Institute podcast. My name is Trudy Smith. I've been your host for the previous 99 iterations of this podcast, and I'm so delighted to welcome you here for episode number 100. We began in May, 2019 with an idea that we would talk to professionals and families about hearing and vision education, health, hot topic items, resources, lived experience. And I hope that you've enjoyed this journey as much as I have. Looking forward to lots of future episodes, but here we are, number 100, so welcome. And I especially welcome Professor Greg Lee, who is my guest for today. Welcome Greg, can you please in introduce yourself to the audience?

Professor Greg Lee:

Hi, Trudy, and thanks for the opportunity to be here. It's a privilege. As you said, I'm Greg Lee. I have the singular honor of being director of the Next Sense Institute, which as people will know, is the organization that gives rise to this event. But it's also the research and professional education arm of Next Sense, which we operate so delightfully in collaboration with our partners at Macquarie University.

Trudy Smith:

Thank you, Greg. Now, you are a teacher of the deaf, and I'm wondering what made you decide that was going to be the profession for you?

Professor Greg Lee:

I think, Trudy, in a world where people are now enjoying multiple careers across their lifetime, I've been particularly fortunate that I made a decision at a very early stage of my career to do two things. One, to pursue a career in education, but specifically in what we would've called, then and still do in many quarters, special education. Really it was a decision based around the fact that the college where I did my initial education as a teacher had an option in special education. And by coincidence, my brother was very friendly with the son of one of the heads of department in that area who very skillfully persuaded me that this was some way that I could pursue a career in a slightly different area of education. And it's been a decision that I've absolutely loved making ever since.

Trudy Smith:

Where did you train and start your practice, Greg?

Professor Greg Lee:

I did both my initial teacher education and my special education initial qualification at what was Mt Gravatt College of Advanced Education, which became of course, part of Griffith University. And my degree, I went back to do my education degree, was through Griffith University. My mentors over that period of time, I'm delighted to say, were people who have been very considerably regarded in our field. Initially I trained with Merve Hyde, Professor Merv Hyde, but through my bachelor's degree, I had the pleasure of

working with Des Power, who became a great friend, colleague and mentor, and is sadly mourned by our field of course.

Trudy Smith:

Absolutely. And I actually had the privilege of training under theirs in my degree at Griffith university. It's such a contribution to the field that he made. Greg, you decided to work towards an academic role. Can you tell us a little bit about why you did that?

Professor Greg Lee:

Look, easy decision for me. The practical aspects of what I've done over the years have always engaged me, but I've never had anything other than an absolutely ingrained view that what we do has to be led by science, by evidence. And to that end, as part it's how I became engaged with Des Power, as part of my degree, I did an independent study, a mini thesis, as it was supervised by Des, looking at all those years ago, at questioning behavior and question answering by deaf and hard of hearing students.

I had the great fortune of taking up a role in Mount Isa, in north west Queensland, as I know you did, Trudy, at one point in your career, or a long part of your career. And while I was there, I had the great fortune of making my interest in my postgraduate education patent to some of the good citizens in Mount Isa, and through that was encouraged into and pursued a rotary foundation scholarship, which I was successful in gaining, which meant that I was able to travel to the United States where I did my master's degree in speech and hearing science and education at the deaf at Washington University at Central Institute for the Deaf.

And really, that secured a career long engagement with research and investigation that took me down that path. So by the time I returned to Australia, there was an opportunity to take up an academic career through a position at Deakin University in Victoria, where I was for seven years, during which time I coordinated the Teacher of the Deaf Program, graduate diploma in special education in education of the deaf, as it was then. And then, very fortunately, was in on the ground floor when the concept of what we now know as Next Sense Institute, what was the RIDBC Renwick College, or Renwick college, and then later the Renwick Center, came into fruition.

Trudy Smith:

Thank you. And it's interesting, there's been such a pathway of research in your path, but also training the field. Why do you think specialist qualifications are so important to the work of children who are deaf and hard of hearing?

Professor Greg Lee:

Absolutely of the view that what all kids need are great teachers, first and foremost. But I'm also completely of the view that to add to that, to accommodate the needs of learners who have very specific learning needs, and clearly for kids who are deaf or hard of hearing, and just as much for kids who are blind or have low vision, that there is a set of skills, both knowledge and skills, that really need to equip a teacher to be able to be their best at teaching kids who are deaf.

Being a great teacher isn't just enough. There really is a need to delve deeper into what the language and communication needs of kids who are deaf are, what the social developmental needs of kids who are deaf or hard of hearing are. And I'm completely convinced, I was initially, I was through my initial training, and I remained convinced, that to do that adequately or to support other teachers adequately in their efforts to provide a properly rounded and effective education for kids who are deaf or hard of hearing, absolutely need specialist knowledge and skills. And I'm frankly delighted that I've been able to be part of that provision over such a long period of time.

Trudy Smith:

Absolutely. I could not agree more with you around the value in the importance of specialist qualification, that skills and knowledge that qualified teachers of the deaf bring to the role make all of the difference for students. But before they get to school, it's about early identification and diagnosis of that hearing loss. And you were heavily involved in the development of the newborn hearing screen program in Australia. I wonder if you can talk to us a little bit about your involvement in that and the significant contribution that's made to education for children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Professor Greg Lee:

Yeah. Thanks, Trudy. Look, I'm asked this question a lot. This was raised with me a lot, and you are absolutely right that I've been involved for a long time with what was the initial advocacy for, and then ultimately engagement with newborn hearing screening in Australia. But to my great delight, that's been part of a willing band of committed people, is no sense in which I have any particularly individual responsibility or ownership of that, although I've been on that journey for a long time with a great group of people. I think back on where we've come from, and where we are now, in 2000, there were no population based newborn hearing screening programs anywhere in Australia. We had the great fortune of a pilot program in Western Australia, and we had a great high risk identification program and screening for those kids in Victoria, but there was no population based universal newborn hearing screening happening in Australia.

What was a committed group of professionals, got together to convene a meeting that was to achieve, where we worked towards a consensus around the need for newborn hearing screening in Australia. Had 101 people at a meeting in Adelaide in 2001. And as I say, that really gave rise to what we now know as the Australian Newborn Hearing Screening Committee, what started out as the National Newborn Hearing Screening Committee. I was at that meeting in Adelaide, in March, 2001, became involved with the committee sometime after that. And that group of people have met every six weeks on a Thursday evening ever since. And for the last 16 years of that journey, I've had the great pleasure of being chair of that group.

And as I say, a lot of people standing on the shoulders of a lot of work that had been done internationally were able to assemble the evidence and set on a path of advocacy with governments around the country to achieve what I think has been one of the singularly most influential and important developments in our field. And that is to ensure that we identify children at the earliest possible time, which of course, in and of itself, is no magic bullet, but which allows intervention at the earliest possible time. No matter

what that intervention is, that knowledge gives rise to a world of understanding of needs for a child and their family. Doesn't guarantee an outcome, but thank goodness it's put us in a situation where we can achieve outcomes that frankly, when I started in the field 43 years ago, we only dreamt about.

Trudy Smith:

Absolutely. And I've been in the field 25 years and I couldn't have dreamt about them when I graduated as well. It's been extraordinary. You've had such a very career, Greg, in terms of your contributions. Is that the task that you've been most proud of being part of?

Professor Greg Lee:

Yeah, I'd say so, Trudy. It's certainly one that's given me enormous amount of joy. I use this rather public forum to shout out the people that I've worked with in that space over these years, because I don't know a group of people who are more uniformly committed to good outcomes for the people they work with than that group of people who make up the Newborn Hearing Screening Committee.

Just to reflect on how far we've come, when I came into the field, there was a couple of really important texts that were part of the literature. At the time, there was a book by Kathryn Meadow, K Meadow, called Deafness And Child Development. And there was a book by Susan Gregory out of the UK called The Deaf Child and His Family. And between those two books, I remember, as a student, learning about what Susan Gregory called the path to diagnosis being suspicion and slow realization, and how on average, at that time, in the United Kingdom, that the path to identifying a hearing loss meant that children were often anywhere between two, two and a half, sometimes as old as two and three quarters, three years old, before a firm diagnosis of hearing loss was identified.

Now, we're particularly lucky in Australia that even at that time, we had a much quicker path to diagnosis, mainly because of the existence of what we now know is Hearing Australia, what was back then The National Acoustics Laboratory and later Australian Hearing. But even so, the gulf between then and now is just remarkable that we are setting kids and families on a path to what's right for them, whatever that might be, at the earliest possible time. So, yeah. Look, the fact that I'm harping on it probably does suggest it's the thing that I'm most pleased about in my career. But there's a lot to be pleased about. I still see kids that I taught 40 years ago, and that's always a singular pleasure as well, to be able to join those dots up over a lifetime.

Trudy Smith:

Absolutely. It's a extraordinary contribution over a long period of time. And now that you are shaping the teachers of the deaf for the future, Greg, I wonder, what do you most enjoy about that role, working with the early career teachers of the deaf as they shape their journeys into this field?

Professor Greg Lee:

As much as anything, Trudy, what I really enjoy now is seeing that there are colleagues coming in behind me doing that, and yourself included in that. Not suggesting that I'm departing the field anytime soon, but I am at the other end of it. And I still enjoy it enormously. I get a kick out of teaching. I do miss, and have for several years now, the in-person experience of working with students, but I get great deal of enjoyment out of working with research higher degree students in that space, always will, I think. I'd like to think that even when the time comes, still when, not anytime soon, when the time comes, I'd really like to keep engaged with that part of what I do in some way.

Trudy Smith:

That's great. So what advice would you give to anyone listening to this considering entering training to become a teacher of the deaf?

Professor Greg Lee:

Well, first and foremost, do it because we urgently need people to be working in this field. For reasons that we're not entirely sure about, we do have an aging population of people working with... Well, we know why people get old, but we're not sure why, disproportionately, we're in this situation. But on the basis of personal experience, I couldn't have asked for more, as a young teacher starting out, than the extent of fulfillment that I've had out of a career working in the field. And that goes across so many different levels. So if you're listening to this and you are thinking about it, the potential to work with children and their families, the potential to work with children as part of a community and the diversity of those communities mean that I've got links into friends in students in the deaf community, the hard of hearing community, the broader field of special education and the field of educational research.

Every one of those reaches into different communities has been thoroughly interesting and thoroughly engaging. And it's a terribly hackneyed word, but thoroughly rewarding as well. It's at the risk of throwing in yet another cliché, there's never been a dull moment across that time. And I don't know any of my colleagues who have chosen to work in this area that would say otherwise, that there's been a dull moment. And what they've done is just the capacity for intellectual and practical engagement in something that's really meaningful that I would encourage anybody into as a career option. I really haven't met people who have thought otherwise.

Trudy Smith:

I completely agree. I've been in the field 25 years, came early, completely fulfilled by this work and founded to be utterly joyful and incredibly meaningful. And I agree completely. And thank you, Greg, so much for being with us for this episode, number 100. Thank you to everybody who's been with us on this journey and whether you've listened to all 100 episodes, we hope that you've found this useful, engaging and meaningful. If you'd like to become a teacher of the deaf or perhaps blind and low vision, we'll share links with how you can do that. We will share a link to the Newborn Hearing Screening Committee. We're paid so that you can meet some of people that Greg has mentioned and worked with as well. But thank you everyone for being with us on this journey. We

will be back after an Easter holiday break on the 2nd of May. We look forward to talking to you then. Thank you, Greg, for your time today.

Professor Greg Lee:

Thank you, Trudy. Episode 100, no mean feat. So, well done.

Trudy Smith:

Thank you.