**Transcript of No Labels Episode 30 August 2022**

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**Intro**

Kia ora. This program is brought to you by Wellington Access Radio. Get your voice heard. I've been asked to tell you about No Labels. The radio show for, by, and about, people living with disabilities. The show offers interviews and news about the disability sector in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

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**Thomas Bryan**

Welcome to this edition of No Labels for the end of August. We have a guest with us today who hasn't been on the show before but has quite a high profile one way or another – out in the media, in our communities, and right up front in the area of disability and accessibility. And so, Minister Williams, welcome to the show.

**Minister Williams**

Oh, thank you very much for having me on today. It's an absolute pleasure.

**Thomas Bryan**

Thank you for coming in. And it's great to have someone in the studio and not over Zoom. It's always makes a better-quality recording. We had a show a few weeks ago, where we had three people plus myself, and we're all on Zoom, and one of them was in the car. So, it made interesting listening. But no, so great to have you here.

Now we all see bits and pieces in the media with you in the house. But maybe if you could tell our listeners a little about you. Where you grew up, I know you've got a family in Auckland, Wellington and the Cook Islands and Australia.

**Minister Williams**

Thank you very much for that. I mean, it's not often that you get the chance to talk a little bit about yourself. So, my name, I tell a joke. Hope you don't mind.

I tell this joke - and I shouldn't laugh about it. But my name is Munokoa Poto Williams. And I tell people that it means the beautiful black pearl of the Pacific.

And then everyone goes “Ah”, but that's what I tell people. Actually, it doesn't. We haven't got a clue what it means, at least we have a small clue, but it's a very, very old ancient name. But names are very important, and the Pacific community and it kind of links you to family.

It also, you know, establishes connections to place. It's one of the things that I think is important about who I am, and who we are, how we identify and how we establish ourselves to family and place. I think it's one of the things that I possibly bring to this role. If you understand who you are, and what is important to you, and you are able to articulate that, it means that people will respect that hopefully and treat you in that vein. So, when we're talking about other communities or other important things in people's lives, it might be how they identify themselves in terms of gender, or sexuality or whatever. It's always really important to be respectful. That's one of the things my parents have taught me. So, I was born here in Wellington.

**Thomas Bryan**

Great place to live and be born.

**Minister Williams**

And my parents had the opportunity to move to Auckland. So, I was here for a grand total of 14 days before we moved to Auckland. Where I did my schooling and pretty much grew up there. But I moved to Christchurch at the end of 2012. After the biggest part of the earthquake sequence. I went there to help the community organisations that were there on the ground, doing amazing work, but looking for a little bit of support. And I've been there ever since and became a member of Parliament at the end of 2013.

**Thomas Bryan**

And so, before going to Parliament, what were you doing? I know you went to medical tech.

**Minister Williams**

I did Yes, I did my MBA, Master of Business Administration, through MIT, but it was actually a host campus for the University of Southern Cross, which is based in Australia, New South Wales, and have campuses and virtual campuses all over the world. But the last kind of 15 - 20 years or so of my working life has largely been in the community sector. So, health and disability through residential services, mental health. But a big portion of my career has been in family and sexual violence and running woman's refuge and violence organisations and networks and the like.

**Thomas Bryan**

You made a comment about identity. And you're so right that, anyone who's been to a marae, know very much so that it is about where you come from, who you are, who your ancestors are, what you relate to, whether it's, you know, your mountain, whatever. But it is about your place, and your history And it's so important, and I think sometimes, and just in New Zealand as a culture people don't always relate to that. They say, oh, well, I was born in wherever. And that's it. But with Pacific cultures, Māori, and other cultures as well, it is very much about where I've come from.

**Minister Williams**

Yeah, don't you think that that also applies to everybody. And it's given us the ability and the license to say, ‘This is who I am, this is what I believe in, this is how you can be respectful of me and the things that were important to me’.

**Thomas Bryan**

And I think, you know, sometimes, even like in the disability community, it may not be about where I'm from, it actually may be about my journey through disability. I may have gone to a special school, or I may have acquired a disability later in life. It's, I guess what people relate to and part of their journey.

**Minister Williams**

Absolutely.

**Thomas Bryan**

Yeah. So, in Parliament, you've had a number of portfolios, and you still have a number of portfolios.

**Minister Williams**

I do. Yes. So, I started you know as a backbench MP. Even when we came into Government, even as a backbench MP, an electorate MP, there's lots of work that you do on the ground with your local communities, looking for housing, getting access to benefits for example, or dealing with ACC, all really important stuff. When we came into government I had a role as an Assistant Speaker, which I absolutely loved. I love process and parliamentary process is pretty prescribed. And there are lots of very big personalities to manage in the parliamentary setting.

**Thomas Bryan**

I can imagine. Yeah, you just have to listen to the house sometimes.

**Minister Williams**

So yeah, that has given me a kind of good grounding really in dealing with some big personalities and other areas. When we were returned to Government, and 2020, the Prime Minister gave me the absolute honour of taking the Police portfolio, the Building and Construction portfolio, and a couple of Associate roles. I had an Associate role with children, which has brought me into touch with some of the things that are happening with the Royal Commission of Inquiry, for example. And a role as an Associate for Housing, which was directly looking at public housing. And I know that these are issues that are important to our communities and our disabled communities in particular.

**Thomas Bryan**

Very much so. Those portfolios, they are fairly massive portfolios – police, housing, etc, they're really meaty pieces of parts of government to be responsible for.

**Minister Williams**

They certainly are, they are big portfolios and important for people's everyday life. But when the opportunity came to do this work, and also take the Conservation portfolio, if you can imagine people go through their parliamentary and ministerial careers, never having the ability to launch a new ministry. And that's pretty significant and important.

And so, for me the chance to do that, was one I couldn't pass up. So, I was enormously grateful to be given the opportunity to launch Whaikaha. And now really, now we're putting the pieces together about what the ministry will do going forward. And I know there's a lot of interest in who will help in that role in terms of the chief executive. And I know it's been tantalizing to say that we're getting close, but we are absolutely getting close to announcing who that will be. And it will be a couple of days after the first of the next month. So, after the first of September, we will be able to sign that out and make those announcements.

**Thomas Bryan**

And I think the community have been dying to know who it is. So, I think that will be we'll all be tuned to radio, TV, stuff, whatever to hear that early in September. So, Minister, the work you did in the community, Women's Refuge, etc. a lot of that would have been great sort of grounding and in many respects to seeing first hand some of the real issues that are out there in the community facing disadvantaged groups, but also helping you I guess, in your new role as minister.

**Minister Williams**

One of the things that, I guess, is a theme that many people talk to me about, is when we have the ability to have agency for ourselves, when we don't have that agency for ourselves how difficult it can be. But at the extreme end of that, when there is a real difference in the power dynamic that exists in relationships, so in some of the roles that I've had, particularly in supporting service delivery, for people with health conditions, and disabled people, it's led me along a journey of understanding what you need to do to support people to have their own voice and have control of their own lives. So, it has been hugely important to be able to come into this role, having had that background, having seen and talked to people who have experienced some difficult times, so that we know, we can do things to improve that. And also we can make sure many of these things don't happen again.

**Thomas Bryan**

So Minister, the new ministry, it's only been a very short time that it's been up and running, operational, etc. What are some of the things you see that it's going to have to deal with or address or try and find a way forward with in its first year or so?

**Minister Williams**

Well, firstly, it was an absolute pleasure to have the role and then to launch the new ministry. We've been operating since the first of July. And as everyone will be aware, we are in the phase really of developing the work plan going forward. What is really important is that the ministry delivers services in terms of the Disability Support Service. It has brought under the umbrella of the ministry, the Office of Disability Issues. So, lots of the policy discussions continue as robustly as they have in the past.

But I guess one of the most important pieces of work that we're working on right now, and that will take us through a period of time as the Enabling Good Lives roll out. For those who are part of Enabling Good Lives and enjoy the flexibility that it provides to them in terms of what they can achieve for themselves and the control that they can have over their lives and the support that they get. We know that for many, it is a really good opportunity, but we have to do a couple of things first.

The first thing we're doing is building some capacity and capability out on the community. And talking to a whole lot of people about what is great about Enabling Good Lives and engaging people and that kind of wider discussion. We want to make sure that when we're ready to roll it out that we do it in such a way that it is achievable, and it hits the kinds of targets and measures that needs to happen. So, we're looking at, you know, first and foremost, some public awareness and building some capability capacity in the community.

And then looking at how we might phase the rollout of Enabling Good Lives around the country. And it might be that we look at, you know, doing it place based looking at specific areas to start, you know, rolling out from the three pilots that we initially had in place, but we want to make sure we do it right. So, there's a bit of foundational work that needs to happen. And then very soon after that, people will see there is a phased approach to ensuring we can do this across the country in a way that suits disabled people, but those people who - the organisations that will be providing the service and support as well.

**Thomas Bryan**

Right, yes, because we had over the last few years or so a few guests talking about Enabling Good Lives and I think, from what the guests have said, and from people accessing the pilot services, it’s going to be a transformational way of receiving services, where individuals will have the ability to often choose, where they haven’t had in the past the opportunity to choose, who will be providing that level of support for them.

**Minister Williams**

Part of the budget that has transferred over and that we have successfully been able to take on board, the delivery of disability support services continues, but part of the budget will be looking at the opportunities that people have been talking about, where family are able to provide that support where it's important to our tangata whaikaha where that happens. We're looking at things like strengthening sign language, and the use of sign language.

We're looking at how we can make sure that the delivery of Disability Support Services is sufficient. We've been able to secure some contingency funding for increased levels of service that are required. So, there are pieces of work that really support and strengthen the work that's already been happening, but also push that support into other areas as well. While we are looking at the rollout of Enabling Good Lives, we know that there are people who are being supported now who need to have that support continue, but also that there are opportunities for us to do more in that space.

The ministry is also really important in driving ahead, the whole idea of enabling accessible societies and accessibility in general. And we want to start with ensuring that our government agencies are doing everything they can in that space, and that they meet the targets that is required of them; that any engagement a disabled person has with a government agency is as enabling as possible. So today, I'm looking at signing out some letters, to my fellow ministers to say what my expectations of the government ministries will be. And that's a big step. But it is saying, you know, as a public service, as government agencies, our tangata whaikaha engage with us every day. And those engagements need to be as enabling as possible. And as a minister, and as a ministry, you need to do what is required to make sure that that's the case.

**Thomas Bryan**

Because we had on the show a while ago, Anne Hawker from MSD, talking to us about access charter that they've rolled out, which obviously is making a huge difference for getting information. But obviously, there's more to do than just information. So that sounds like it will be great initiative. And hopefully, ministers will step up and take heed or else.

**Minister Williams**

Well, you know, that is all part of this. It's our job now to insist that government agencies and ministers take responsibility for what we all know should be happening across our ministries.

**Thomas Bryan**

In the house the other day, there was a bill introduced – um, access?

**Minister Williams**

Accessibility? Yes, that's right.

**Thomas Bryan**

So, we've does that sort of sit at the moment? So, it's obviously the first reading in the house. And what happens next?

**Minister Williams**

The accessibility legislation introduced just a few weeks ago is now and in select committee. The important part of the select committee process, and I'm pleased to be talking about that because one of the things we asked the chair of the committee to do was to look at extending the report back time. Normal select committee processes are about six months, we've asked to add another three months to that to give everybody an opportunity to submit. We've also asked the committee to ensure that the bill and the hearings will be accessible to those who need to submit, that the material is provided in as many different formats as possible, and that the hearings are held around the country. We wouldn't want people to have the imposition of travel, we want the hearings to, the submissions process to, go to them.

But it's important for people to make submissions, we want to know if the legislation is meeting the mark - we think that it is, but we're open to hearing how we can make improvements to the bill. And this is where the community really needs to come on board. So have a look - through the parliamentary website you will have access to the material. If it's not there in a format that suits you. I would encourage you to get hold of me and my office and we can ensure that that happens. But we want as many people to make submissions as possible to this process.

**Thomas Bryan**

And I think it's a great opportunity for people to have their say, we all have different views of whatever it might be. But I think you know, we've waited so long for A) a new ministry and now, legislation. If we don't say anything and sit on our hands, then we don't really have the right to complain afterwards.

**Minister Williams**

But we do have to remember, sometimes we don't provide this information or the opportunities in a way that people can engage. So, we're trying to do this as broadly as possible.

**Thomas Bryan**

It's what I usually say to people when they complain about, you know, local body elections, or whatever it is. And I'll say, “Well, did you vote?” “No, no, waste of time”. “Well don't complain”.

You touched on earlier about the inquiry that's happening at the moment and the sessions and I know, a number of disabled people came forward to tell their stories, and we heard some of those in the media, and I must say, quite horrific, to be quite honest. So where does that go to now? So, we've obviously, people have told their stories and I think we've started to hear back from government officials as to their feedback.

**Minister Williams**

Yes. And their acknowledgments, which I think are the important thing. For anybody who has had those experiences, the bravery of coming forward and reliving them and sharing those experiences, you know, that that takes a lot of courage. And we're all really grateful for people actually talking about their experiences and sharing them in that way. What happens now, is you're right, government agencies are responding and they're making acknowledgments of the way that policies were set up and the ways that people behaved. And really, you know, giving, I guess, the ability for people to have an acknowledgement that their experiences are really important to this process; that their experiences and talking about them are important, not just perhaps for themselves, to acknowledge the hurt that has been caused, but so that we ensure that it doesn't happen again. And that what will happen post the government acknowledgments is the commission will then report back to government with a whole raft of recommendations It is then up to government to examine those, and then advice the communities, and the very brave people who've told their stories, about what will happen into the future to ensure that we don't allow this to happen again.

**Thomas Bryan**

And I must admit, though, I can't speak highly enough of people who put themselves forward to do that. Some of the stories were pretty horrific, and so very brave of them. And I'm sure that's probably just the tip of the iceberg, in some respects, for some people.

**Minister Williams**

Indeed.

**Thomas Bryan**

Minister, so what's next up for you? Do you have any plans for the future? Not heading off to the UN?

**Minister Williams**

Might be.

**Thomas Bryan**

That you can share with us?

**Minister Williams**

Yes, no, I can actually. We are off to the UN. Of course, the Convention on the Rights for Disabled People is having an examination, and we are one of the few countries to have a second opportunity at this, the last time we were in front of the UN was in 2014. And I can remember because I think I had the opposition role at the time, portfolio at the time, I can remember when the honourable Nicky Wagner went to the UN. So, it is our time to talk about what we have done in that intervening time; how we have, we're working towards meeting those commitments. I mentioned the fact that it's our second time and that's fairly unique for a country, so there will be quite high expectations that we are meeting those obligations in a much more fulsome way than we were a few years ago, and that we've put some other things in place. Of course, it will also give me the opportunity to meet Sir Robert Martin, who has just recently been re-elected. And he won't be sitting on our particular examination, but he is part of the group that is looking at the various countries and how they meet their obligations under the convention.

So, we're taking a team of about nine - the Independent Monitoring Mechanism, which is the DPO plus the ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission and a few others presenting as well. So, people can be assured that this is not about us going and saying how wonderful we are, this is making, talking genuinely about the things that we have achieved, but the things that we have yet to achieve. And the IMM are there to talk about, from their point of view, how well we've done, but what else they see as the opportunities to do better in this space.

We're looking at, it goes over several days, and the examination itself are a couple of three-hour sessions, so they're quite fulsome. And we're taking a team of senior officials, including Brian Coffey, who was at one, and one or two others. I think Matt Frost even, I think he was potentially at the previous examination. So, you know, well versed in the mahi. And, you know, I hope to play an informed role, but I know where the real the real strength of the work has lain with those who have been in this mahi for some time now.

**Thomas Bryan**

Yes, we're hoping to have a show, once people have come back from Geneva with some of the IMF group to talk about their experience, because it's a really amazing, unique experience for anyone to be able to go to the UN, and just be there. It's like, going to Parliament for the first time. It's a huge experience. It certainly was, for me the first time I went to Parliament, and I was in the house that night that the Convention was adopted by the government, and that was such a great night. And I can only imagine what it will be like for anyone going to Geneva

**Minister Williams**

It's a huge privilege to be able to accompany the delegation to go, it really is.

**Thomas Bryan**

So yeah, a full view on the team. Well, Minister, thank you so much for coming in and sharing so much with us and especially coming into the studio. It's always great to have people here and would love to have you back at some point. And what song are we going to go out with today?

**Minister Williams**

Well given that we've been through some tough times over the last couple of years, ‘There's a Fraction too much Friction’ is my pick from Tim Finn. I think it's nice for us just to remember the great things in life right and let's put all the all the silly stuff to one side.

**Thomas Bryan**

Great. Well thank you minister for coming in and here we go with Tim Finn

**Song**

"There's a fraction, too much friction

There's a fraction, too much friction

There's a fraction, too much friction, yeah, yeah

There's a fraction, too much friction

Take a typical man put him

With a typical woman then

Sit back and watch everything slide

It's a perfectly natural

Expression of ill will but

When will hostilities subside?

There's a fraction, too much friction

There's a fraction, too much friction, yeah

Don't believe in opposing factions

What we need is some positive action

There's a fraction, too much friction, yeah, oh, yeah

It's a very old problem that

Goes back to the dark ages

The wages of original sin”

**Outro**

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