**Autism Hub - Valuable lessons in designing senior pathways TRANSCRIPT**

- So, in your experience, what has been a valuable lesson that you've learnt from your work in Senior Pathways with young people with autism? Michael, I'm going to start with you.

- Well, my big take home I think for me personally as a parent and as well as when I teach, is finding the opportunities for people to locate their strengths. And when they do that they find their tribe. And when they find their tribe, they find their social network and their friendship networks, and that then gives them the confidence to do perhaps more social and academic risk-taking where they'll feel more likely that they might succeed.

- Thank you. Sharon, what about you? You say often that your most valuable experience has actually been with your beautiful daughter, Olivia who's 22. And so, what do you think she's taught you Sharon?

- Look, and Michael would say the same. It is our normal, like I love everything about her difference. And she gives me context I guess. I suppose an answer to your question, I just think giving context is what we need to do around all situations, everything. Why do you do a job interview? What's the importance of that? Like, we don't really explain those nuances of everything we do. And so, I think we need to be better at giving context, because once these beautiful people understand why they've got to do this stuff and what the expectations and this beautiful Ryan, he said to me one day two or three years ago, Sharon, you do all this autism awareness training. Where's the neurotypical training? Why aren't you teaching me about what you want? And I'm like, that's amazing. So, I said, what do you want to learn? And he said, I want to know why we got to talk at events and why are events important? And why do you put so much importance on teamwork? I like working on my own. Amazing points. So, yeah. So, I did write some modules on why small talk is important to neurotypicals and why teamwork's important to neurotypicals. And so, they read that and go, oh, okay. Now I see why they do this and talk about the weather. And in my beautiful team, we were outnumbered and they would make fun of us and go she's talking about the weather again, or I'd say, how are you feeling? And they'd go. I don't feel Sharon, so, that's beautiful. I'll finish with that.

- That's great learning. And yeah, absolutely. And if they are things that we do tend to turn on their side, don't we? So, I love that. What about you, Karen? What has been a valuable learning for you in this space?

- I've been really fortunate to work across a number of schools with a number of amazing staff and families, but the biggest thing that I can take away and my advice to give to anybody on this kind of Senior Pathway journey is the value of being flexible, the value of experience and the most valuable is the student voice. So, I would always start a conversation when I used to do meetings with students and say, what is it that when you, what is it that you're going to do when you leave school? And I didn't even give them an opportunity to answer. And I'd say, is it work? Is it a learning? Or is it a combination of both? Because it's not sitting on the couch, eating chips and using the WIFI at home post-school. And they kind of look at me, but it was a really good conversation to make them really think about what they wanted to do. And then we would always work backwards. And when I worked at schools that work fabulous with allowing students to maybe go to TAFE and choose some of those subjects, like Lynelle was talking about that possibly wasn't anything they wanted to do when they left school but it gave them confidence. Or students were doing traineeships whilst they're at school. And a traineeship is just like doing a subject at school, except you do it in the workplace and you get paid. It's not their forever job, but the confidence that I've seen grow with so many students, because we've allowed students to be flexible in their approach to learning. And that schools have been open-minded and said, okay, well, let's let the student drive what happens. So, the earlier people start allowing young people to engage in conversations about their future, the better the outcomes.

- Fabulous. And Lynelle, we'll come to you.

- My comment follows on from Karen, actually, that just that early intervention, getting to know the student, involving the family as much as we can as well, but starting to track. And that's something that our school does a lot is just tracking the student development the interests they've tried something, no, that's not it, let's change direction, but just keeping an eye on that and constantly checking in the whole way through, from the end of Year 9 to the end of Year 12 and a lesson we had too, was just actually having an exit meeting. So, in Term Three, getting the family and having the student, the key stakeholders, who've worked with the students through that time, and just checking that they do have a plan for after school. And it's not in 50 years time, but just, what are you doing next year when suddenly you have 30 extra hours in your week that you're not going to be here with us. And just making sure that the students have a bit of an action checklist of, well, you need to be making sure you're doing these things and the family knows as well. So, I think you're sending them on their way with just a little bit of a toolkit and some ideas as well. And the success that you talk about Sharon, we'll often get students coming back and sharing, oh I'm on a TAFE now, or I've got a job, and it's just amazing just to see that happening. So, that's really what it's all about is having a successful and positive post-school outcomes.