

BEST WORST



BEST DAY WORST DAY
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PROUDLY
SUPPORTED
BY

NORTH WESTERN
MELBOURNE PRIMARY
HEALTH NETWORK,
VICHEALTH AND
CREATIVE BRIMBANK

PUBLISHED:
MONDAY
10.05.2021

2:11

DURATION
41:45MIN

JOE BALL

02

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EPISODE 2 –
JOE BALL

00:02

MUSIC

[Upbeat music playing]

MONDAY DURATION
10.05.2021 41:45MIN

00:13

INTRODUCTION VOICEOVER

I started like a chaotic time...
Without bad without good. I've always preferred to end with good.
So being an intersex person, people don't usually understand what intersex is all about...
My arts practice has been exploring the intersection of being Aboriginal or queer...
Our community, again, respecting our Elders enough to fight for it. And that's pretty bestest.

00:34

SAM ELKIN

Best Day, Worst Day is a podcast where I get to know a bit more about some of the LGBTIQ+ artists and activists I've been really inspired by. I asked them to tell me about a good time they've had and a bad time they've had and what if anything, they've learned from those experiences. Their answers have always been fascinating.

00:50

INTRODUCTION VOICEOVER

Just being able to make someone that happy to show that much love. That was that was probably one of the best things I've ever done. This is the first time in a very long time that we won. Who's doing anything in this era?

01:05

SAM ELKIN

This peer support project is supported by the Northwestern Melbourne Primary Health Network, VIC health and a proud part of Brimbank City Council's work for Victoria Artists in Residency. This project touches on many topics like suicide, loss of loved ones, poor mental health and experiences of hospitalisation.

01:22

INTRODUCTION VOICEOVER

Don't know whether to call it a major breakdown, maybe that's the worst [laughing] day. For a whole year I was in terrible grief, and I did a lot of advocacy from that grief.

01:33

SAM ELKIN

Best Day, Worst Day, a podcast made in Naarm, on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

01:45

MUSIC

[Upbeat music fades out]

01:46

JOE BALL

My name is Joe Ball and I'm the CEO of Switchboard Victoria. And I've been in that role since December 2016. My pronouns are they and them and I proudly identify as transgender non binary. I am a parent to two children and I live on Wurundjeri land in the Kulin nation. I grew up in Brisbane. Well, that's not exactly correct. I say that but I didn't really grow up in [laughs] in the suburbs of Brisbane.

I grew up in the suburbs of Redland Shire, and I grew up in Capalaba, Bergdahl and Cleveland and that's in the Redland Shire. The most things that people know about the Redland shires that also includes North Stradbroke Island where I did spend some of my youth, teenage years being a surf lifesaver on North Stradbroke Island, which is a lesser-known fact about myself. I lived in Queensland, I lived in Brisbane until I was 19. And I grew up under Joh Bjelke-Petersen, which I think was a really formative backdrop in my life. You know, it was illegal to be homosexual, as it was defined, until 1991. And so, a lot of my earlier years, there was a backdrop of that. Also, Bjelke-Petersen is known for his far-right politics. And so, you know, growing up under that environment, there was a lot of racism that was later followed with the likes of Pauline Hanson. So, I grew up I guess, in an environment of - we used to talk about it as a redneck wonderland [laughs]. And I think that Brisbane is not the place it was when I grew up. And I think it's a more, definitely a more multicultural place and a more diverse place, a way higher population. But the background of my life was growing up in very white suburbs, under a very repressive government. And that had a particular I guess, influence on my life about wanting to fight for social justice and wanting to make the world a better place. My first foray into it was probably in primary school when I started to become very interested in environmental politics.

And for a couple of years in a row, I organised the Clean Up Australia Day at our primary school, which seems funny now. But I think that that was my early instincts towards collective action and the power of not one person but a united group of people. And in this case, a united group of people picking up rubbish. I was always really interested in the recycling program as well. And when I was younger, went in the [inaudible] as they were called in Brisbane. And so, I think for me, it was a really early on interest in environmental politics. In high school being involved in anti-French nuclear testing in the Pacific, and then Jabiluka and fighting for the end of the uranium mining industry. And I guess that was sort of where I started and what intersected with that and diversified my politics was also understanding land rights and the land right campaigns that come with environmental issues. And working on the Jabiluka campaign, and my 19, 20-year-old self really started to understand land rights and traditional owners and that politics. And then in addition to that, was also that I was queer. And I became interested in my own liberation as well as anti-racism work. And really, I was involved in a number of campaigns and student activism at the University of Queensland, around issues of, like IVF access for lesbians, which was not allowed and was not accessible. So that was the one of the campaigns I was really involved in. I was also to equalizing the age of consent. We raised the issue of the gay hate defence - panic defence - which was alive and well in Queensland at that time. I was doing queer politics; I was doing environmental politics. And then I became really influenced by the other movements that happened at the time, which was East Timor, which seemed just a very easy connection, I guess, to where I was politically at at the time, and I became interested in a free East Timor, which fitted in with the other politics that were burgeoning. And I guess I started to develop a just a general all-rounded political aspect of fighting. Which I guess started, if you will, but those early ideas of collecting rubbish with people for Clean Up Australia Day, I started to, you know, I started to develop an all-round politics about taking collective action, being in solidarity with each other, the power of the people, united action, unionism, and I guess that's the foundations of my political perspective and the foundations of who I am, as a person. Keenly interested in addressing the drivers of climate change and addressing climate change, which I think is the greatest environmental challenge facing us. And so I'm - but I think that you don't need to be an environmentalist to care about climate change. I think you can be a humanist; you can be - you can be anyone, really. Everyone should be really concerned about it. What I think about activism is that it's something that you can come and go from. And I think that's really important. I think that I'm a lifelong committed to building a better future and fighting for social justice. And I think that that takes on different forms. But I am really committed to the idea of, I guess, staying radical.

And that doesn't mean that you're always on the front line, or always doing the same form of activism. But I think that having a commitment to change is really important. You know, I left Queensland when I was 19, and sort of leaving to get out of a big country town, and escape some of wanting to go to somewhere that was bigger, and had more going on, in many ways, culturally, and, and politically. And so I went to Sydney, and I went, lived in Sydney for 11 years. And in the middle of living in Sydney, I spent a year and a half in London, and then returned to Sydney. And then I moved to Melbourne. And I think for me, like, I think I've on all cases, I guess that I have moved with partners. And but I think I've also had a mind of wanting to live in different places at different times. Of the benefit of that, I think it's - I think there's always a part of you that feels nostalgia or bad for the place that you were born in. And that will always be Brisbane and always have some kind of affinity to the places that I grew up in. The Redland Shire and Brisbane. And... I mean, I just the other day, my kids said to me, we're Victorians. And I said, Yes, yes, I am a Victorian, we're Victorians. And I felt like that was definitely a moment of, that's who I am now. Career wise, when I started out, I started out working in disability support work. And I'm really passionate about disability support work and the rights of people with disabilities. And it's something that I've seen that I might return to later in my life. It's not what I'm doing now. So I started my career out working with adults with intellectual disabilities. And I found that extremely rewarding work but extremely challenging work in regards to how disabling society is for people with disabilities. There's an adage about people with disabilities, which is that... Are you disabled? Or does society disable you? And I think I definitely saw in that work; how disabling society is for people with intellectual disabilities and how it doesn't accommodate the needs in a really repressive way. And although I was working in that field at a time, that was probably the best it had ever been, as in it was deinstitutionalized and people were being supported to live in their own homes, there was still a lot of unpacking that needed to be done then, and still needs to be done now. And I saw a lot of poverty, a huge amount of poverty with people with disabilities. So I think that that was a really important introduction to community service work that I had.

And I really cherish that time I spent working with people with intellectual disabilities. And I feel like it's left with me a feeling of wanting to remember that struggle. And the important struggle there that is there for that group of people in society and the marginalization that takes place and the outright oppression, for sure. Joe worked with people with disabilities in housing, I worked in housing and homelessness, which is another, you know, another extremely challenging place. And again, I guess I want to iterate is that it wasn't the people that I've ever worked with that were challenging, it was always the system and how little flexibility and little support and little investment financially was in people's lives. So, I think housing and homelessness really burnt me out because there was such a crisis then, and I'm talking about the early 2000s. And that crisis has only gotten worse in housing and homelessness as far as I can see. And I was really burnt out by the system of that you had people who were homeless that I was supporting as a caseworker. And there was absolutely nowhere to house them. And you had case management meetings on park benches, and people were living night to night. And it's it's, as far as I can tell is the same now. So, I think for me, I got burnt out by the system of feeling like I was trying to make a change. And there was so much bureaucracy and lack of change at a policy and government level to addressing the issue. And so, I decided that I'd take a job that was less at the front line, like I needed a bit of a change. And I went worked for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which is... most people when I say that it's just such a groan, they just... how boring is that? But I really loved it. I worked on the 2011 census, and I managed the Northern Beaches count of the census, which I have some real geekery about the statistics of the population and the Northern Beaches that I still hold on to from that time, and spouting it to people about demographics in Avalon. I've surprised some people with that data. And I found that a really interesting time. I'm a big proponent of the census.

And I use the data all the time in my current job. And I think it is really important even though it's really complicated, and the census has a really complicated history of particularly... I mean that's what the 1968 referendum for Aboriginal people was actually about. You know, it's about getting Aboriginal people to be counted in the census and therefore deemed as no longer flora and fauna. So it has a really complicated history of who gets counted, what we record. But I think that it also has done a lot of good. And the 1970s, Whitlam changed the questions that were asked on the census, and if anyone's paid any attention to the census, you know, it asked quite a remarkable question on the census about how much unpaid labour is done in the household in that week. And that very question, you know, was fought for by feminists and led to a whole level of feminist research out of that census data of showing double burden of women's labour in the home on an Australian level. So the census in itself is an incredible piece of political history. And it was incredible to work on it in a really practical way. It taught me a lot about Australians' attitudes to data collection, for sure, because I went back and worked on the 2016 census, which is renowned for being the data crash, the electronic form, failed on census night, and people couldn't complete it. And in between, I worked in the public service, let's just say that I also worked for another department that's even less interesting. And so I worked for the Australian public service. And I was really, a really proud public servant. Which, I always liked that Michelle Obama talked about, that she wears a cardigan to honour the public servants. Some people know that public servants are called cardigan-wearers. I always really appreciated that she said that because I think that a lot of public services is important. It is complicated, because you're working to the government of the day, and in ways you're enacting policies that you can, at times, depending on where you're sitting in the government, enact policies that you strongly disagree with. But I also believe that there is a need for the work that I did in housing, homelessness and in disability in my career for good public service in order to change policies and release funding and take taxation dollars and you know, redistribute it in particular policy initiatives that really make a difference in people's lives. There's the radical enters the public service, but I think that that's also had a huge impact on my life is the years I spent in the community sector, the public service and then... Then I left the public service and... story about coming to Switchboard where I am right now. How I came to Switchboard was that I was working in the public service, and I realised that I was transgender. And I realised that I was non binary, and I was working in management in the public service. I guess I had known for a very long time that I was transgender.

But I think career in the public service, I'd sort of started to realise I was coming to a stage of my life, if you like, where I wanted to be out as transgender and be recognised for who I really was. And I felt like I'd probably had a good couple of decades of repressing that, of who I was. And what I realised in the public service is that it was going to be this huge impact on my career, if I came out. I just knew it. I knew that I wouldn't be able to get very far in my career. If I started telling the staff that I manage, can you please use the pronouns they/them, can you please recognise that I'm transgender? Can we make changes around the toilets? It just felt, in the Australian public service at that time, at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, that that would be the biggest uphill battle. And I guess that was really illuminating for me. And I was involved in the Pride network and things like that. And I think the realisation of my own identity, wanting to realise my own identity at work in a meaningful way. And realising the hurdles, I realised that I wanted to get back into working for my community in a more direct way. And I actually wanted to serve my community in a way that I couldn't as a public servant, and I wanted to do direct service delivery. I really missed it. I had that from the disability work, I really missed that actually providing, actually helping people in this really concrete way. When you're a public servant, you are helping people, but it's a few things removed. And so that's the combination of those factors led me to applying for the job at Switchboard. And here I am [laughing], four years on now, still here.

Sometimes I have the song going in my head, 'I'm still standing', and I certainly am [laughing]. A pandemic, a postal survey and many other things later, and I'm still happily in the role.

14:49

MUSIC

['I'm still standing' chorus plays]

14:55

JOE BALL

So I'm going to talk about suicide, which I'm going to do it in a really safe way. So, talking about it but not gonna tell any details or anything like that. So, the worst day for me at Switchboard is the day I found out that my staff member had suicided. And... I found out because her father called me. And when he called me, I was actually in an airport. And I thought it was really unusual that her father, my staff member's father was calling me, because that doesn't really happen as a boss, that you get parents calling you. And he told me that she had died. And I was just so shocked. Absolutely, of course, I was like, just... And he was completely distraught. And then he told me that she... Of course, I said, how did she die? I think I asked that. I'm not completely sure if I asked that, or he offered it up. But anyway, he told me that she died by suicide. And I feel like nobody should be in an airport when they get this kind of information. Like, the airport is the most sterile... Basically tried to find a corner in the airport, as he was talking. It was like I knew, I was like, he's going to tell me something really intense, like because, 'cause I knew, because her father was calling. I tried to find this airport, the quiet spot. And what I remember is standing outside a lolly shop. And looking at the lollies in those plastic self serve containers. It was one of those lolly shops where you self serve and you fill up a bag of lollies and I remember just looking at them, as he was telling me this information. And the woman from the lolly shop came out and looked at me. And I feel like she wanted to really, really help me because she must have seen on my face everything that I was feeling. And she... I could, definitely did not want her to come over. But it was just a really human experience between two people, I guess, of her feeling completely helpless. And nobody ever really thinks that as a boss, that you will have to take that kind of phone call. Like you never sign up for a job and think that that's something that's going to happen to you or expect that a someone that you employ will later die.

And you certainly don't think that they're going to die by suicide. In some ways talking about it, it was absolutely the worst day. But many, many terrible days followed as I had to play a role of leading Switchboard as an organisation through the horror of what happened. I had to support other staff members who had lost a colleague and friend, at the same time as having lost a colleague and friend myself. I had to tell people who I had to tell my board members that night, after receiving the phone call, what had happened. There's two times in my life where I have had a visceral reaction to grief. And this was one of them, is that... So I was at an airport, I was actually in Sydney. I'd just arrived to go to a conference. So I had to go back to Melbourne, immediately. And I ended up staying overnight and I caught like a 5am flight the next day to go back to Melbourne to face this situation. And my partner picked me up from the airport and I couldn't make full drive home from the airport. I had to pull over the side of the road and be sick. And there's only one other time in my life where I've had such a visceral reaction to grief. And the other was when my father died. And then the thing that went on from this experience is that I have never cried so much in a workplace.

So over the year that followed her death, I said to all my staff members, that it's okay to cry in the office. And sometimes I'm going to cry in the office. And I sought to give them permission as much as permission for myself to work through such a difficult situation. And... [sigh] and the other thing that was really complicated about it all was that I also - I went to three funerals for her. Family funeral, which I'm not going to comment publicly much on, but it's probably a funeral that you would fear as a queer person, is what I would say.

I went to that funeral; I went to a family and friends funeral and then I organised with my staff for a community funeral. And I think that was quite intense as well. Like never as a boss, do you think... And I spoke at all those funerals. And you never think that you would play that role. But I think that's what it means to the fact that that can happen within working in a community organisation, a community-controlled organisation, is that people are part of your community and you have a greater responsibility to each other than you do at any other workforce. There's many things I could say, I guess, about this event and as many things I have said in different forums, but probably the most summarising one is that it completely changed my life. That is something that's quite complicated again, about what happened is that I think what it has done for me it has become it has made me like a very fierce advocate for the prevention of LGBTIQ+ suicide, because she was a queer woman of colour, and that was a really important part of her identity. And there was a contributing factor there for sure, in her suicide, and I think, it gave me this immense fire in my belly that is not extinguished three years on. And I feel so motivated to make things better in this space at every level. So I really worked really hard internally at Switchboard to transform the way that we work on our phones and in all our services. So all of our staff, whether they work on the phones, work in the community visitor programme, or they are the finance officer, they're all trained in the suicide assist programme, which is about being able to respond to people who are feeling suicidal. And I have been to Canberra, to advocate. And I continue to constantly advocate around this issue for funding, to - for the prevention of LGBTIQ+ suicide. . And I'm so, so so motivated. And I think that's something that probably connects to who I am as a person, is that.. it's the only way that I can make sense of this situation is to fight for a better world. A world where hopefully, someone like her would feel like there was more options at hand. And yeah, I think it's... It changes over time how I feel, you know, for a whole year, I was in terrible grief about her. And I did a lot of advocacy from that grief. And I think it's transformed over time. And now, I have a fire within me that came from that grief of losing her. And a fire that is stoked every time I know of an LGBTIQ+ person who suicides. But it is... it is different. And it's always different when you lose someone close to you to suicide as opposed to someone you don't know. But I think that I will, from my worst day at Switchboard I have managed - and more importantly, we as an organisation and as a Switchboard community, have managed to honour her life - Ingrid Zhang - honour her life with a commitment to preventing LGBTIQ+ suicide and... It's really difficult, but I wouldn't - I've learned so much through the experience. And, and I do feel like, a great sense of obligation and commitment and passion to share what I learned. So also that people who are in the future community leadership roles in the future can feel like they were supported in a way that... I felt quite alone when it happened.

And that's why like, just last month, we released an LGBTIQ+ postvention resource, which is from our experience as an organisation, and it's for community leaders to support people when they go through, when they lose someone in the community to suicide. Yeah, that's my worst day. I am at peace with that day. But I also didn't get there alone. I had lots of support from my counsellor, my partner, Jack, my wonderful staff who we pulled together, and my incredible board at Switchboard and the community who rallied around me and our organisation and supported us. So yes, that's my worst day. I also had thoughts of when this is over, I will resign, I will see the organise - I never ever thought that I would resign within the crisis, that I'd walk away from within the crisis because I felt I felt a huge amount of responsibility to my staff who had lost someone that they cared about greatly. So... and I felt a huge amount of responsibility to the community that still needed our service. Regardless of what we were going through. I didn't feel like - I definitely didn't, definitely had a bit of a mantra going on of like, I'll get us through this, and then it will be over. And I think that's what I probably needed to say to myself at the time [laughs] to deal with it. But you know, there was a couple of projects I was involved in that were really transformative. I mean, obviously there was the project of my own counselling [laughs] that I undertook which was very, very important.

And no matter where you work in an organisation, no matter what you do, counselling works, and you should do it. And that was really, really helpful to me. But another thing that was really helpful to me was bleeding right into the issue and I produced a podcast called 'Let's talk about suicide' that I did with JOY and the producer Hamish Blunck and Louise Flynn from Support After Suicide, and that's a great organisation if you're listening and want support, is Support After Suicide is really good. And we've got a current partnership with them to do LGBTQIA+ bereavement groups, which is something that's completely come out of this situation. Making the podcast which is 14 episodes where we talk about grief and loss and looking after yourself and how you support other people that are going through it was a really cathartic process. It was super healing. I mean, it was really... I mean, Hamish had lost his partner to suicide, I had lost Ingrid, and Louise worked with people who are bereaved by suicide. And I think - so for me and Hamish, it was definitely a lived experience of, it was two lived experience people, but we - I think we both healed through the process. And I didn't go into that podcast, 'Let's Talk about Suicide' to heal myself, I kind of went into it thinking that maybe I owed it to Ingrid or, you know, owed it to the issue and was surprised... the healing process of actually being able to share what I had learned, kind of the circle of healing. And also giving voice to other people because there's lived experience voices in that story, other people telling their story. And to be able to give other people a voice was also really healing. So I think that finding purpose for your grief is not always possible. And it's not always the approach for everyone. But it was definitely what I needed to do. I needed to make sense of the situation by trying to create change for the next person. The best day for me is the day that I successfully won the campaign to get Out & About program refunded. Let me take you back. So the Out & About program is our older persons visiting program. And that's where we support volunteers to go and visit older LGBTQIA+ people who live in aged care facilities or live in their own home. A lot of the people that we support through this visiting programme have aged related disabilities, and that's why they're on homecare. A lot of people have dementia, and most people have nobody else in their life. And that's why we visit them. And the people across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, we support a number of older trans women, a number of older gay men and lesbians, bisexual people - we actually support somebody who came out as bisexual for the first time in their life in an aged care facility. Proudly says that she discovered she was bisexual when she watched Hannah Gadsby's show 'Nanette' [laughs], so she discovered her sexuality. So we support a whole range of the alphabet, older people, it's a service that's super heartwarming, and also challenging at times to see the consequences of oppression and a lifetime of it.

So we support people who lived through the criminalization of homosexuality, people who lost employment, we support ageing gay men who have AIDS-related dementia. And we support people who are transitioning for the first time in an aged care facility who you know, number of people who've got onto hormones for the first time and living their affirmed gender for the first time at so late in their life. So, there's so many great stories, there's so much love in the program and intergenerational friendship. But there's also a lot of heartache about what it has meant to grow up queer in Australia and now be an older person. So the program, just before the last election, found out on Christmas Eve of all times that we were going to lose two thirds of our funding from this program. And there's been a bit of a history this, it's called the community visitor scheme program. It's federally funded. There's been a bit of a history where... wait for the last minute to tell you whether they're going to fund you and waiting for the last minute doesn't really matter if they roll the funding over. But it certainly matters when they decide to cut two thirds of the money from it. One of the things they decided to do with two thirds of our money is give it to a mainstream organisation in Queensland that had offered a better deal on the CVS, better economic rationalist deal. And they were going to send iPads out to people in Victoria, who are LGBTI and get workers to call them from Queensland on iPads. And the people who were going to be calling them didn't identify as part of the community. So we lost funding through this kind of really economic rationalist approach.

And it just was so crazy that this mainstream organisation that had no rainbow tick, was not LGBTIQ+ progressed in a meaningful way, didn't have LGBTI workers, were suddenly just going to get all our funding or two thirds of our funding which would have made our service - we wouldn't have been deliver it because it wouldn't have been able to pay the staff member who ran the service to run it. It was just absolute crisis that we were facing. And imagine cutting money on Christmas Eve to a program that supports you know, socially isolated people who live in aged care and in their own homes. Like what a ruthless, absolutely ruthless action. And so there was very little I could do over the Christmas New Year period. But I came back with a sense - to this day, I don't... I mean, maybe it's just my activist foundations. But to this day, I don't know why I felt so convinced, I just felt so absolutely convinced that we were going to get the money back. And I think in partly it derived from the fact that I just - the service is really incredible. It's a really good program that supports many older people in our community that are getting support nowhere else and people who would have nobody else in their life. So I just felt like this is crazy. This is so, this is so off the charts, that they have cut this funding, and I just felt like we are going to get this back. And I just felt this sense of just That's it, we're gonna do this. And so I led the campaign within the organisation to get the funding back with the two incredible Out & About workers at the time, Meredith Butler and Ada Castle, Ada being the manager. And you know, I devised this plan, which I must give credit to Felicity Marlowe also gave me some ideas at the time about how we could run the campaign, mainly how I could badger politicians. She has a few expertise in that area, as she's the Rainbow Families Victoria founder.

And so I did use this campaign plan to get our funding back, which was quite amazing. Many things happened. People came on board, joined the campaign. And you know, lots of people wrote to the Minister at the time, he was Ken Wyatt, who was the Aged Care Commissioner at the time. Lots of people wrote him, people tweeted at him. And just like sort of some funny anecdotes is that one thing I did is I decided it was just a lead- The leverage was, is it was leading up to the federal election. And I really used that leverage. And I think that's really important about political campaigns is understanding where your leverage is, and the leverage was, what a bunch of ruthless whatsits that they would cut funding on Christmas Eve, and I can reminded them of that of constantly, it's just before a federal election, and there's an Aged Care Royal Commission just around the corner. So, I used kind of three things to create some leverage, and it was just not a good news story for the government. That you know, needs the LGBTIQ+ vote and needs that vote in Victoria. So I just, I did this quite funny thing where wherever Ken Wyatt went, I would try and get somebody to ask him about our program. So, you know, he'd go out and do consultations with the community around aged care. And I'd try and find someone who was going to meet with him and I'd say, hey, if you get to meet with Ken Wyatt, can you just ask him about the Out & About Switchboard Victoria CVS program? Which was quite crafty, and I'm quite proud of. But I basically created this kind of thing where he kept getting asked about it by people who worked in aged care. About, hey, how about this issue, and, and eventually that led, I believe, to him meeting with us. That and one other issue, which is that Labor came out and said that if they win that election, they will restore our money. So I think the combination of surrounding him with a bit of a Twitter social media storm, people writing letters, him feeling like wherever he went, people brought it up, wherever he went in Victoria, that is, and the fact that the ALP had promised that they would restore our funding kind of created this climate around it. And he eventually met with us and said that there's no need to wait for the election, he would restore our funding immediately. And you know, he came to our office to make that. And that was incre- and one of the things that was really incredible when he came to our office and sat in a circle with us, and he met some of the older people, because we knew he was going to announce them. We knew the day before he was going to come into the office and he was going to announce that he was going to give the money back. So we tried to get number of people have been involved in the campaign.

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DURATION
41:45MIN

And most importantly, one of the older people in the service Toni Paynter, who had been a real advocate and have gone on Radio National and spoken about this issue as well. And Tony had been just such - is, they're part of the program, but was an amazing activist during the campaign to get the funds back. But it made sure that Toni was there. We had all these group of like the board were there, staff were there, volunteers from the program were there. And he sat in a circle with us. And the first words he said to his absolute credit was, I'm sorry, we made a mistake. And... you tell me when you've ever heard a politician say that? I was, it was quite an amazing moment. Amazing moment of having a politician admit that. I walked out of the best day. Yes, that moment was the best day but the moment I felt really incredible was when all that was over and we boarded Ken Wyatt, Minster Wyatt out of the office and I decided I'd just go for a walk by myself and celebration was kind of over. And I was just walking through Bourke Street and I just felt like I was walking on a cloud. All I could think was, If you don't fight, you lose. I just kept thinking, we won. If you don't fight, you lose. And so many people had told me that there's no point I could count on both hands, the number of influential people in the advocacy space in the LGBTQIA+ advocacy space who said to me, Joe, I'm really sorry, that sounds really awful. You you run a fantastic program, but there's no point, you've lost the money, they've given it to somebody else, you won't be able to get it back. If they've given it to somebody else, you won't be to get it back. And I thought about that, as I walked out of the office, I thought, just never take it lying down. Stand up, you can win this. Collective action can win. And, sure there was a number of factors. But if I'd taken the advice of people who are more my seniors, it would have been the wrong advice in this instance. And I felt like... this sounds so corny. I know this sounds really corny. But I listened to the song, 'What have you done today to make yourself feel proud' [laughs] That song? Now what have you done today to make yourself feel proud? I listened to that song. And I felt like I was in ecstasy of having... I mean it's probably a massive sense of relief that I'd saved people's jobs, saved the program. And done what people had said was the undoable. It was probably all those things, but I just felt like I was so just so elated that day, it was just the best day and it was probably like I walked around for 20 minutes. Just feeling like fists in the air. Yes, we did it. We did it.

And I just felt such love such profound love for people who had done... The team at Radio National that had agreed to do the story. I think that made a big difference and got me on to RN Drive to speak about it, I think that made a big difference. The community radio, I spoke on Triple R, 3CR, and JOY. I think the community radio really helped. And I felt such love for all those people who had said, Yeah, we're going to run this story, we'll get you on there and talk about it. And I felt such love for like people who had hand written letters, even just joined the Twitter storm. And I just felt such love for people, I guess, afterwards. As an activist, growing up as an activist, I'd had already a lifetime of experiencing campaign losses, working on environmental campaigns, like Jabiluka or mining campaigns, as I spoke about earlier, that we just lost many campaigns that I'd worked on. And it just felt, this is the first time in a very long time that we won. And we smashed it out of the park. And I think I just feel like that's why it's the best day ever, because it was just - it was imagining the impossible, and it was never giving up. And it was having some kind of deep belligerence [laughs], which I cannot describe now that I just knew we were going to do it. And that there were so many incredible people that believed in and believed in us and believed in the service. And to this day, we now have a service that, through COVID-19, has supported 70 people who would have had nobody in their life, no doubt, through a pandemic that, they would have had nobody in their life. And those 70 people, they deserve that service and that's why we did it. Our community again, respecting our elders enough to fight for it. And that's pretty bestest.
