

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE – PUBLIC SECTOR UNEARTHED

EPISODE #7

**THE STORY OF FITZROY CROSSING COMMUNITY CENTRE WITH EWA
GRIFFITHS AND ZARA NEHOW**

Ewa Griffiths (guest)

Director of the face-to-face service transformation branch
Department of Social Services

Zara Nehow (guest)

Manager of zone 3 Western Australia
Face-to-face service transformation branch
Department of Social Services

Julia Ahrens (host)

Communications and Engagement Manager
IPAA ACT

12 March 2024

Enquiries should be directed to Julia Ahrens at julia.ahrens@act.ipaa.org.au

Delivered in a partnership between IPAA ACT and contentgroup

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JULIA AHRENS:

Hello, everyone. Before we get started with this podcast, we'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land in which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal and the Ngambri people, and pay our respects to the eldest past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. We'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast is also joining us from.

EWA GRIFFITHS:

When we started in 2019, we always knew that it wasn't a one-size-fits-all and that there were different community needs depending on where we go. So, a couple of years down the track, we did a second piece of research where we really focused on some of our more remote and very remote areas and learned through that process that co-design and consultation are really important to include if we're going to be successful to actually then deliver that right service and that right environment for the community.

ZARA NEHOW:

Being the pilot site and being the example for the other two sites that are currently going to be developed with the staff, they also provide that feedback as well as the customer. So that continual feedback, it's the only way that we're going to improve and to be the example for other service centres around Australia respectively. So yeah, it's only going to get better.

JULIA AHRENS:

Welcome to Public Sector Unearthed, our Work with Purpose podcast spinoff series about the people who drive grassroots change and reform in Australia's public sector. My name is Julia Ahrens and I'm IPAA ACT's communications and engagement manager. It's really good to be here today as your host. As you know, on Public Sector Unearthed, we are putting people and their stories front and centre, and our guests talk about their journeys in the public service, how they're making a difference through projects they work on, through mentoring, communities of practice, diversity and inclusion networks, and the effect of promotion of the values and purpose of the public sector. As always, at the beginning of the podcast, you hear the voices of today's episode and this time those are Ewa Griffiths and Zara Nehow. Ewa is a director within the Face-to-Face Service Transformation branch at the Department of Social Services and Zara is a manager, zone three, Western Australia at the Department of Social Services as well.

Zara and Ewa were part of a very special team that won the award for community engagement at last year's IPAA ACT Spirit of Service Awards for the outstanding initiative in redeveloping Fitzroy Crossing Service Centre. Throughout this process, the department worked closely with the community at every step through co-design leading to a unique space that is respectful of local requirements and includes many elements reflecting cultural aspects and indigenous arts, and so you'll hear a bit about that in the upcoming episode and Zara will also describe to us what the place actually looks like. So those two, Zara and Ewa, they're deeply motivated by driving positive change and played really crucial roles in working with the community to make the centre of what it is today. Let's hear from them.

So, it's so great to be online here today with Ewa and Zara, thank you so much for joining us.

EWA GRIFFITHS: Thank you, thanks for having us.

JULIA AHRENS: So, before we talk about Fitzroy Crossing a bit more, I'd love to learn more about the two of you. So maybe starting with you, Ewa, what was the thing that motivated you to join the public service?

EWA GRIFFITHS: So, I joined many, many, many years ago, about 25 years ago, after working in community organisations for the first part of my career. And really felt that I wanted to make a difference in people's lives and felt that the best way I could do that was to join the public service and make some difference to the lives of the people that do need to access our services. So yeah, that's what brought me here.

JULIA AHRENS: That's lovely. And Zara, how about you?

ZARA NEHOW: Yes, the same as me. Actually, my 21st year this year with the agency.

JULIA AHRENS: Amazing.

ZARA NEHOW: Prior to that, I was actually with Queensland State Government, Department of Employment and Training, so I did an apprenticeship, a traineeship with them. And here to apply for the position with the agency, it was more about job security. Yeah. And here I am, still here and enjoying it.

JULIA AHRENS: And currently based at Fitzroy Crossing, so give our listeners a bit of an idea, because you are dialling in from there, straight from there, telling us about Fitzroy Crossing Service Centre, so I'd love to hear what actually brought you to Fitzroy Crossing specifically, because there's obviously a bit of a story behind that.

ZARA NEHOW: Yeah, so I was actually working in the Indigenous call centre based in Cairns with the agency, and then they had actually asked for somebody who wanted to go to Fitzroy Crossing to help out with the office at the time. It was only manned by a manager, and that's really what it was. It's just the manager. So, they asked for somebody to come out, so I said, "Yeah, sure. Whereabout is it?" Yeah, so from Cairns flying out, was here for two and a half weeks, and then as I was leaving this place, I had tears in my eyes and, yeah, decided to make it formal in October 2007. So, I've been here ever since, so yeah.

JULIA AHRENS: What made you feel that strong connection to Fitzroy Crossing?

ZARA NEHOW: It was the elderly people of the area, that's who I fell in love with. Listening to them and their stories and them wanting to be able to teach outsiders about the culture and about the language, so it was that inviting aura that they gave. That's what wanted to make me stay, so yeah.

JULIA AHRENS: Yeah. No, that's really powerful and beautiful, to have that connection with the community there in Fitzroy Crossing obviously being a place for people to come together like that. And Ewa, can you tell us a bit more about the redesign of Fitzroy Crossing? What brought it on? What was the reason why you wanted to redesign it and how have you gone about it?

- EWA GRIFFITHS: Well, like Zara, I think I looked up where Fitzroy Crossing was as well, going, "Okay, where is it?" When we had made the call to transform the service centre as our first blueprint, the Spoke Service Centre. So, I've been lucky enough to have many different jobs in the agency, but in 2019, joined what is the Face-to-Face Transformation Project and we started off with quite an extensive piece of research. You know, understanding what the needs of customers were, what the pain points were of staff and customers, and how we can redesign our service centres to address those needs and pain points. And when we started in 2019, we always knew that it wasn't a one-size-fits-all and that there were different community needs depending on where we go.
- So, a couple of years down the track, we did a second piece of research where we really focused on some of our more remote and very remote areas and learned through that process that co-design and consultation are really important to include if we're going to be successful to actually then deliver that right service and that right environment for the community. And so, Fitzroy Crossing was one of those service centres that we identified where a co-design community approach is the best way to go and... Yeah, there and the rest is history, I guess. 17 hours later for myself, heading up there and working with Zara and team and other people, Sandy and others, to get that redesign and contemporary service centre up and running.
- JULIA AHRENS: You talk about history and story. So, what's the history of Zara and Ewa, how have you worked together on this project? Ewa?
- EWA GRIFFITHS: How have we worked together, Zara?
- ZARA NEHOW: Like I said, I came into the manager's role. Prior to that, I was actually in a trip leader, so a remote service trip leader role. And the manager at the time, she was the one who had a lot of the meetings back and forth with the team about how the approach was going to happen. And then she left and then I came in at the time when they were doing the stakeholder engagements and having that remote service team trip leader background, had the connections with the people in the community and surrounding communities from the valley. So yes, it was just one of those things about how you want to come in and sit in, and then these more people want to ask you some questions about wanting to design the new office. So yes, it was really just doing that. It was just getting them to come and speak to-
- EWA GRIFFITHS: Making those connections, yeah. And I think the absolute vital role that Zara and the manager and other staff play to make those connections is really that first step. So, we need those really great relationships that our managers, and Zara is an example of that, have ongoing with community for them to facilitate, I suppose, then the conversations that we were able to have with people, but also that third step, and that's about closing the loop. So, after we talked to lots and lots of people, we took that information away, we then relied on Zara to close that loop and let people know how that information's been used and what the results are of that consultation.
- JULIA AHRENS: Yes. And that community connection, obviously, remains today a very, very important part of the services centre, and probably was a very important part

when the centre initially... Obviously, it opened in late 2022 and then it got flooded, so you had to go through a whole process again to design and reestablish the centre. How did this affect... How did the flood affect the redesign, Zara?

ZARA NEHOW: The redesign. Yeah, the team was actually really great. Obviously, everything was still brand new with what we had in the office itself and I think one of the biggest things was the community members, when they came in, they were all excited. They were happy to see this brand-new office and it was heartbreaking for them when it did get flooded, and then having to be relocated at a temporary site for-

EWA GRIFFITHS: A long time.

ZARA NEHOW: Yeah. From January to October '23. It was great, though, because when the team did come back in again over a weekend, they actually came... Instead of over a weekend, they were actually here for four weeks, so the construction, the reconstruction of the office. And people were able to see that, yes, we had those workers that were coming in, so they were getting excited, just as excited as we were that the office was being refurbished again.

JULIA AHRENS: Yeah. You obviously talk a bit about the community response to the place. Can you tell us a bit more about what the centre looks like now and what people, when they walk in for the first time, what do they see? What do they notice about it?

ZARA NEHOW: Yeah, they are... When they walk in with the blue, they can't remember the colour of the blue that's in the centre, but people actually have actually commented about how relaxing and calming the colour is. And then walking in and seeing that we have a map of the valley of the Fitzroy township where the five language groups are actually based on that screen. And yeah, it's just... They come in and it's just pretty much... Well, you see a welcome sign on the left wall, and they'll just bypass the reception area together and we'll just sit down, and they find that even just the furniture, it's just so relaxing and so welcoming and warming. And a lot of it is, from the community consultation, is around the privacy. And that's... The team had taken on board from a lot of that community feedback, was the privacy aspect. And yeah, they love the designs of the booths and how it's created. And then with the extra exit that we have that goes out into the breezeway, so the flow of customer traffic in and out through the office, absolutely nothing.

JULIA AHRENS: That's fantastic. So Ewa, can you tell me a bit more... Obviously, Zara has described what the service centre looks like and a bit about the process and how people perceive it right now, but what have you learned from this whole process? Because there's obviously more services centres that you want to redesign the future. What are the main lessons you've drawn from this process?

EWA GRIFFITHS: So, I think that the key lesson and what the original research told us was absolutely right, that the key is actually working with people and going to a community with an open mind, not going in with a conclusion as to where we're going to land, I think is a key learning. Absolutely being flexible with how our planning and then how we actually then... What happened on the day. So don't

be so locked into your process and your government approach. You do need to be responsive to what is happening in the community. And Zara, we moved, we thought we'd have this consultation in the community centre and customers would come and talk to us. We pivoted very quickly, because there wasn't anyone coming in, so we went to the service centre, and we were able to then really talk with lots and lots of people.

I think almost 40 customers that afternoon came and engaged through Zara's nudging, "Come and talk to these guys over here, they want to hear from you." So going forward with an open mind and not thinking, just because we've done Fitzroy Crossing, that the next one is going to look exactly like Fitzroy Crossing. And so, we're in the process now of engaging with two other communities, one in Western Australia and one in far North Queensland, and already we have different feedback and different needs from those communities. And that's really awesome, to be able to go, "This approach actually is genuine, and we are being bespoke and we are responding to those individual community needs within what we can." Obviously, the blue is the blue that we have. We're not going to change the blue, but we can certainly do lots of other things that can bring that community feel, connection, welcoming, and then those other important elements like privacy is a really important element across all of our service centres, but more so in those very small communities. So, addressing those needs. Yeah.

JULIA AHRENS: Bringing it back one more time to Fitzroy Crossing, specifically the service centre there, what are your hopes for the service centre in the next month, the next years? Where would you like to see it go? Maybe starting with you, Zara.

ZARA NEHOW: That's a hard one, because I think being the pilot site and being the example for the other two sites that are currently going to be developed with the staff, they also provide that feedback as well as the customer. So that continual feedback, it's the only way that we're going to improve and to be the example for other service centres around Australia respectively. So yeah, it's only going to get better and at least we can always say now that, once the other sites get up and developed, we can always go, "We were the first site." So, it's kind of like Australia's following us. But yeah, it's culturally very appropriate for the region, and that's where the team has done a really good... Absolutely great job, in being able to listen to that feedback from the staff as well as the community to be able to develop into what it is now.

JULIA AHRENS: A bit of a shining light, Ewa. What would you like to add to that?

EWA GRIFFITHS: It is, it is. Look, and we continue to work with Zara and the team, and as she mentioned, getting that continual feedback as well. We are trialling a video chat service offer as part of the service offering at Fitzroy Crossing, and that was in response to some cultural requirements options to be able to connect customers to staff outside of the service centre, but also to social workers that are not physically available. So, we'll continue to work with the team to build that out and to understand that more fully, so that we can inform that service option going forward as well across the other remote and very remote localities, yeah. So that's one thing we'll continue to work on, but talking to others, because learning that... I'm sure, Zara, your colleagues in those other sites are ringing you

up and going, "What about this? What did you do?" And it's that support that Zara will continue to provide with all of the others that come after Fitzroy Crossing.

JULIA AHRENS: We'll definitely look forward to hearing about the other places that come after Fitzroy Crossing, but also how Fitzroy Crossing continues as a place, because you obviously walked us through it virtually a little bit today, which was really, really great. And what really stood out for me in this conversation is that you said there, Ewa, about not starting with a conclusion, but making sure that you started the beginning and you unpack where you want to go together and really take that community feedback on board, because without them, it wouldn't be the place that it is today. And I can definitely feel that Zara is adding a lot of spirit to that place, so thank you so much for sharing a bit of that spirit with us today.

EWA GRIFFITHS: Thank you so much.

ZARA NEHOW: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

JULIA AHRENS: Thank you both.

JULIA AHRENS: So, listeners, what did you enjoy about this story today? Let us know by leaving a comment on our social media channels, or even better, by writing a review. We're on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, and many other podcast platforms. Work With Purpose is produced in collaboration between Content Group and the Institute of Public Administration Australia, ACT supported by the Public Service Commission. Public Sector Unearthed will return and fortnight. Bye for now.

JULIA AHRENS: Thank you both. So, listeners, what did you enjoy about this story today? Let us know by leaving a comment on our social media channels, or even better, by writing a review. We're on Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, and many other podcast platforms. Work With Purpose is produced in collaboration between contentgroup and the Institute of Public Administration Australia ACT, supported by the Public Service Commission. Public Sector Unearthed will return in a fortnight. Bye for now.