Jade: (singing) Hi, everyone. Welcome back to Episode 6 of Women with Disabilities Australia or WWDA Youth Network Podcast. Today, we are interviewing Jan. Jan is an avid activist for human rights, who's been involved in a wide array of projects, from being involved with the Disability Justice Network to Democracy in Color. We are so excited to have them on today.

Jade: I will start by acknowledging that I am calling from the [Gubbi Gubbi 00:00:49] Country and that this land was stolen and never ceded. I would also like to acknowledge our elders, past and present and extend that to any indigenous listeners. Jan, could you tell us about yourself and your background?

Jan: Sure. So my full name is [Janice Qian Yee Sam 00:01:08]. I am Malaysian-Chinese, but I grew up in Brunei for most of my life. So I was born to, to Malaysian migrants, who came to Brunei to start a better life and give me and, and my sister a better childhood that they never had and I'm forever blessed for that. And, um, I am currently a third year psychology student at the University of Melbourne, and I am going to graduate in about one and a half year.

Jade: That is so exciting. You must be so excited.

Jan: Yes. (laughs)

Jade: How did you start in activism?

Jan: Um, that's a good question. So I think I started in activism about last year when I was elected as the International Student Representative for the Student Union. I began to learn more about issues that were happening around the world, including refugee right, um, refugee abuse in Australia. I will admit that it was really shocking to hear how refugees were being treated last year for the first time.

Jan: I think what really shocked me the most was it was happening right, like just right under our nose and yet nobody was talking much about it, nobody was paying much attention to it. So I think that's how I got even more passionate in activism, especially hearing how refugees were abused and, you know, the mistreatment of first nations people.

Jade: I think it's definitely one of those things that if you don't, if you d-, you don't look into it, you don't understand.

Jan: Yeah, exactly.

Jade: And people have this mentality, not everyone, but some people have this mentality where they just go from A to B, A to B and they don't really look into anything.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:03:10].

Jade: They don't investigate it. And I th-

Jan: Yeah, definitely.

Jade: I think that's one of the biggest things. I think as a, as a community, as a, everyone being a human being, they should take more care into what's going on around them.

Jan: Yeah, precisely. It's like a lot of people, I believe, they have this mentality, you know, "Out of sight, out of mind. If it's not relevant to me, I won't care that much." And I think, you know, that's how you perpetuate the same problem. That's why we're stuck in the same problem we're in today because nobody is challenging and, um, questioning things like maybe this system is not sustainable and it's actually going to destroy all of us, but they don't think that way.

Jade: That's exactly right. Like it's, like, um, you know, people who don't take into consideration like one step to get into a bank. Well, then you've just knocked out, you know, people with vision impairments, mobility aids. Like there are so many different people who have to have these special requirements. Well, I don't like saying that, but it like have a different way of doing life-

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: ... and if people don't take time to do that, we're just gonna keep going in this way.

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: And I am truly about the belief that our generation could change the world because we do look into things.

Jan: Exactly.

Jade: In regards to the struggles of migrants, temporary visa holds and refugees with disabilities, what do you think the main issues are?

Jan: Um, I think the main issues are that they have literally zero access to support. Like migrants, refugees, and temporary visa holders cannot access Centrelink. They cannot access, um, NDIS Insurance Schemes. They get nothing. In fact, um, migrants, when they come here, they are expected to be here for a r-, for a specific reason, which is to bring in money into the economy.

Jan: And I, as an international student, actually still face the fear of disclosing my disability, because in the v-... When you register for your visa, they actually have this questionnaire about your health and they ask you things like, "Are you disabled? Do you have mobility aids? Uh, do you have mental health issues?"

Jan: I would have to, like, I would have to learn to work around the system. So I would have to emphasize to doctors who are doing these medical checkups for my visa to be approved, I would have to say to them, "Oh yes, I have these, uh, medical conditions, but they don't affect me that much, even if they do..."

Jan: Because if I say they do impact me a lot, there is a very high chance my visa will be canceled, because, you know, migrants and temporary visa holders, they're seen as... Basically, if you can't bring anything into the country that is valuable, you are useless, you're just a burden. We don't want you. Same...

Jan: And refugees, they have it so much worse simply because of their status. Like they were fleeing persecution or maybe there were natural disasters happening at their homes and they've been internally displaced. They have nowhere to go and are forced to flee the country for their safety. But because of their refugee status, they cannot get access to jobs, they cannot get access to education, um, disability support schemes. Nothing. They get nothing. It's terrible.

Jade: That's exactly right. Like I have a friend, um, she's one of my very best friends in the whole wide world. I call her my spina bifida sister and she lives in Canada and Canada's very lucky in the sense of they do have healthcare. But she doesn't have a very great support system over there and she'd really love to come to Australia, but that's just not... It's, it's... She's gonna have to work really hard to do it, because Australia's just gonna look at her and go, "No, you're too much of a problem."

Jan: Yes. Um, the, this sort of system abuse, unfortunately is everywhere.

Jade: Yeah. And it's like, why should she have the opportunity to live in a place where she wants to live just because she has a disability?

Jan: Yeah, exactly. She shouldn't be denied any opportunity. Like, that's the one thing I've, you know, been talking to people about. Um, refugees, migrants, um, temporary visa holders. We should not have to prove our worth just to show that we deserve to live on this land. It's ridiculous. Not to mention this land was stolen to begin with. (laughs)

Jade: (laughs) Exactly.

Jan: It, it's ridiculous.

Jade: There is a lot of, um, potholes within the system.

Jan: Oh yes. Double standards for sure.

Jade: Absolutely.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:08:11] the Ukrainian refugees.

Jade: Exactly. I, I wholeheartedly agree with you. I'd love to hear more about your work within activism for, activism for migrants and temporary visa holders, specifically those with a disability. Could you tell me?

Jan: Um, sure. So I was on the forum with, uh, Disability Justice Network and it was organized by the admin, Mali Hermans and Tori Hobbs. I volunteered to be a public speaker and I just... It was a very emotional event. I just broke down crying during the public, um, speaking and just telling everyone, you know, "Why should we have to prove that we are worthy to exist here regardless..." I mean, why?

Jan: You know, if we cannot bring in money to the country, for example, does that mean we are worth less? And if we're disabled, does that mean we deserve to be thrown in the streets? How does that make sense? And, yeah, that's what I basically told, um, everyone in the forum. It was definitely difficult to talk about, but I was pretty, I guess I was pretty harsh. I was just like, "Is that too much to ask? You know?"

Jade: Yeah. And it's not. Like it's a basic human right.

Jan: Exactly. It's, it's the bare minimum. And I've also had to argue with the university. Um, it wasn't really... I mean, okay. Yeah. I could say it was a bit of an argument, but I basically had to explain to the university and the Student Union how we can improve accessibility for classrooms, especially for international students-

Jade: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jan: ... whose English may be their second language and they have additional disabilities that make it harder for them to learn the language. And we did manage to get closed captions, but it... We still have a long way to go for the university to make su-, to, to get those closed captions lectures more out-

Jade: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jan: ... uh, released more... Released in a shorter timeframe because it can still take ages to get closed caption lectures, which is so ridiculous (laughs).

Jade: That's insane. Like [crosstalk 00:10:40].

Jan: I know.

Jade: Yeah. I feel like closed captions should just... But why they were never a thing, you know, 10 years ago, even still. Um, and now we have like all these like programs and stuff like that and tech.

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: Such good technology. Sometimes I feel like technology is being used for the wrong reasons-

Jan: Yes.

Jade: ... if that makes sense.

Jan: Yes, exactly. Oh my God. Like I've also had to speak to my Student Union this year because they were planning to make all classes available in person and I have to explain to them that not all students have the privilege to come to campus... A lot of... There are some of us who are immunocompromised and with COVID running rampant, it's not safe to come to the campus-

Jade: Right.

Jan: ... especially if you're immunocompromised or you have a family member who is immunocompromised. And I explained to them that the campus is nearly wheelchair-inaccessible. I had so much difficulty coming to campus on my wheelchair that... You know, why should I come to campus and spend hours just to get there when I can just stay at home in the safety of my home and attend classes online?

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: It, it's more feasible that way. And luckily they did take my, they did take my advice and were like, "Okay, fine. We should have thought about that and we, I guess we can make classes online still." Yeah.

Jade: It's crazy that, you know, places are still not wheelchair-friendly or-

Jan: I know.

Jade: Like a-

Jan: [crosstalk 00:12:17], yeah.

Jade: We live in 2022 now. Everything should be accessible, or not everything. Like, there are some restrictions obviously, but basic things like universities, hospitals, everyday things should be-

Jan: Yes.

Jade: ... accessible.

Jan: Yeah, exactly.

Jade: How has the recent movements in COVID impacted this?

Jan: Um, when you mean the recent movements, do you mean like the Black Lives Movement or...

Jade: Yeah. Like all the things that you've been involved in-

Jan: Oh, okay.

Jade: ... how has COVID affected it?

Jan: Uh, so during... So in 2020, I did remember there was a Black Lives Matter Movement.

Jade: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jan: And I didn't go there because, um, COVID, wasn't... You know, we were in lockdown and I was worried about my safety against COVID. So it definitely made me feel a bit anxious. But slowly over time, I began to attend rallies for refugees, especially in 2021 and I became more confident, especially since, um, you know, I've, we've, we got to know about the transmission for COVID better.

Jan: Like it's apparently less transmissible outdoors and if you're wearing masks, the chances of you getting COVID is actually lower. So it definitely gave me more confidence to attend rallies from [crosstalk 00:13:44].

Jade: Yeah. Yeah.

Jan: Um, yeah.

Jade: I think, I think a lot of it has been the way that COVID has been portrayed. Like, I don't think that it... Like, I'm not undermining it at all for immunocompromised or for anybody really.

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: It is scary. It's a scary thing to think about. I find myself like I haven't been going out as much as what I was pre-COVID because it's just... It's genuinely, I have enough medical problems. (laughs)

Jan: Yeah. But it's also like... You know, I think there was an incident that really disgusted me when they blamed the Black Lives Matter Movement for the Southern community transmissions of COVID and that was just false. It did not come from the Black Lives Matter Movement. It was from the failure of hotel quarantine.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: If anything, the rallies taught us that it is possible to control the spread of COVID and still push for social change.

Jade: Exactly.

Jan: The problem is, you know, we haven't been taking much action on risk mitigation and actually decreasing the likelihood of transmission. That, that was where the issue came in.

Jade: Yeah. Um, everyone's just gotta be, everyone's gotta be aware-

Jan: Hmm.

Jade: ... and that's a big thing.

Jan: Exactly.

Jade: People are aware of certain things, but there's a lot of, a lot more that needs to happen.

Jan: Definitely like, you know, more outdoor meetings, better ventilation systems and yeah, just... The rallies have taught us that if you take proper precautions and you're outdoors, the chances of getting COVID is actually lower.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: But sadly, I don't think we've learned from that. (laughs)

Jade: Absolutely. No, I could totally agree. What can we do on the ground as people with disabilities to support others?

Jan: Hmm. What can we do here on the ground? I would definitely say, never stop talking about the issue. We need to have more difficult conversations. I mean, of course do not do it at the expense of your wellbeing. Self care, it's still important. Make sure you take the time to look after yourself. But when, once you get into the activist space, you gotta bring up these difficult topics and, you know, just try to slowly challenge people's thoughts.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: Of course, if they go like, you know, "I don't wanna hear it anymore." Of course, you step back because-

Jade: Exactly.

Jan: Yeah. They make it clear they don't wanna hear about it. But people who do want to learn, people who do wanna know what they can do about it, take the time to say how, you know, what needs to be changed and show them what... You know, the struggles, everything. This is an interesting story. And it's an example.

Jan: My friend didn't understand my frustration with inaccessibility. He was like, "Surely, all buildings must have ramps, right?" And yeah, he was very ignorant at first. But when we went to a building, we saw nothing but stairs-

Jade: Yep.

Jan: And he looked at me and he said, "This is very eyeopening." (laughs)

Jade: Yeah. Like I, I wholeheartedly agree. People don't realize. Like even my friends, like my friends are very... I'm very lucky to have good friends, but sometimes I'll say something like... Uh, I remember this one story that I have very quickly.

Jade: So I have a catheter bag and because I have spina bifida and my bladder doesn't work and that's the way that it happens. So I'm learning to live with that myself. It's a big thing for me to see. I struggle with it and I've got to learn to love myself again with it because it's a part of me now that's going to be with me forever.

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: And, um, I went into Woolies one day and I was just going to the fruit and veg section and then I had to go to the cold section, which is like at two opposite ends of the store. And I walked into the fruit and veg section and I'd seen this lady walking towards me and I seen the way she looked at me and I instantly knew she was going to say something.

Jade: And I was like... I, I, I prepared myself for it because I knew. And as a person with a disability, like that's a real thing. And she turned around and she said to me, she said, "You should find some way to hide that from everyone else." And I was like, "Hide what?" Like I just, I just played it like a fool. "I don't know what you're talking about." She goes, "That audacity of that thing hanging from you."

Jade: I was like, "Excuse me." And there was like 11 other people around because I went into panic attack mode, which is where I count everything around me, look for an escape route, just full blown panic attack. And these people stopped and looked and didn't say anything.

Jan: Oh God, that's the worst part. Yeah. That's, that's something... You know, I was just going to talk about it. Like, you don't need to have a disability to help people with disability. You don't need to, you know, have a disability to understand struggles. It should have been like... Just have empathy. Oh my God. [crosstalk 00:19:12]

Jade: Yeah. Like it's not that hard. And like, this lady was legit like, "You should wear jeans. You should cover it up. You shouldn't wear what you want basically." And I'm like, "Cool. Thanks."

Jan: I think... Yeah. I think that's the problem. Like people without disabilities, they don't understand, um, that they can be a good ally.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: You know, and maybe just help stand up if, for a person with a disability, if you see them being harassed or, you know, because the thing is, um, when we... Okay, we don't want people without disabilities to talk over us, but we also still want them to do something, like just stand beside us and support us, you know?

Jade: [crosstalk 00:19:59].

Jan: Like stand up for us when we're being harassed and actually help fight for change.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:20:06] center our voices. That's all you gotta do.

Jade: And it's all about how, like now when I go to a shop, I do things completely different. Like I have a set of headphones that I wear all the time now because I find 99% people want to talk to me, want to ask me questions. Sometimes I don't have music playing through them. I'm just wearing them because then nobody finds a way to talk to me. I don't mind kids. Kids are totally different because they're curious.

Jade: And like, I've had a kid before say to me in the middle of a shopping center, "What's that?" And I will explain to them what it is, because they're just curious. But a grown adult should know better than to just be like, "You can't do that."

Jan: Yeah, exactly.

Jade: Um, what successes has your movements had, Jan?

Jan: So I'm happy to say that we finally got all the refugees in Park Prison Hotel free. That was a huge win for us [crosstalk 00:21:07].

Jade: That's so exciting.

Jan: It is. Um, well, this isn't to rain on the parade, but unfortunately they've been released into the community without support and yeah, they don't have any financial support, they don't have access to medical care.

Jan: And while the majority of them have psychological trauma, PTSD and underlying disabilities and we are still trying to, you know, help them get access to proper support. We recently had a fundraiser where we filmed this movie called Flee at Thornbury Picture House and it was a major success. Like all the tickets were sold out (laughs). It was-

Jade: That's really cool. It was. I was... And I actually bought a ticket last minute and I was like, "Oh my God, I got the last ticket available." It was, it was a huge success.

Jan: That's insane.

Jade: And see, that shows that there is change out there, right?

Jan: There is.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: And, yeah. I've had people telling me protests do not work. That is not true. Pro-

Jade: That is not true.

Jan: Yeah. Protests do work, but you need to know how to make your goals clear and you gotta learn how to get, you know, the community involved in order to, to push for that social change.

Jade: And you can't be unreasonable either.

Jan: Ah, oh yeah. Exactly.

Jade: Like, like I understand change needs to happen, but there also is like a point where it's like, "Hmm, are we just being a bit unreasonable now with what we want done?" Like, I don't... There's, there's certainly been cases, but most of the time, like you just have to have a clear...

Jan: Yes. It exactly. It's... You see, it's not enough to just say, for example, "Stop the cruel, stop the cruel mistreatment of refugees." "Okay. What do... What needs to be done first?" That's, that's the thing.

Jade: Yeah. Like I always have this analogy that you have to create a, a glass plane, right? So people who don't know can see in, but you can also speak out.

Jan: Yes. Exactly. [crosstalk 00:23:24].

Jade: And it has to be clear either way.

Jan: And you have to... You know, it has to be clear so that people understand the issue well enough to come and help. Because if you just say, "Stop the abuse of refugees," people will be like, "How are refugees being abused?"

Jade: Exactly.

Jan: They, they don't know. And I mean, yes, they should, um, ideally do their own research, but it's not always that simple because internet, you know, you cannot trust everything you see on the internet. That's...

Jade: They really don't know that.

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: Again, so when I meet someone and I tell them I have spina bifida, the first thing I say is, "Don't Google it."

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: Do not Google it because it will say that I should be in a bed with life support basically.

Jan: (laughs) Yeah. Exactly.

Jade: And I'm like very clearly the polar opposite of that.

Jan: (laughs) [crosstalk 00:24:12].

Jade: Like, I, I'm doing things and my doctors are going, "Jade, slow down, stop. Take a breath." What challenges have you found generally in disability activism?

Jan: Oh, that's a good one. Um, I think first of all, is getting people to understand your struggles because, believe it or not, um, I have had people telling me, "Don't worry. I understand what you're going through. I just don't think it's an excuse."

Jade: Ah, cool.

Jan: I, I'm serious. Like one time my friend, well, former friend, was telling me I should have gone to the rally to protest against, to protest against Australia Day. And I said to her, "I agree with the cause, 100%, but the issue here is I have limited mobility. I can't walk. I can't stand for too long. I am... The rally does not seem accessible to me and I'm not comfortable putting my safety in danger."

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: And she said to me, "I went to the rally with dis- with a disability representative and I saw many people with disabilities in mobility aids coming to the rally." So basically it's not that people with disabilities cannot come to the rally. It's that they don't want to come to the rally and are using it as an excuse. Oh, and she-

Jade: No.

Jan: Oh. And she ended it with, "By the way, the platform is wheelchair accessible." (laughs)

Jade: That's not, that's not all the accessibility problems. It's not just, "Is it wheelchair friendly. Okay, cool. I'm, I'm right then. Don't worry about me."

Jan: And the funniest thing is, okay, the frie- the person who said that and the disability representative do not even share the same disabilities I have.

Jade: Oh my God.

Jan: They have like... I think they have, um, mental health issues and, um, learning disabilities. Look, I don't want to compare disabilities, but that's the thing.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: Why are you comparing your disability with mine?

Jade: Exactly.

Jan: Why? (laughs)

Jade: It's, it's like for me, like, yes. Okay. Mobility is a big thing. Like I can't walk long distances. I can't walk up a hill, down a hill. Like it usually has to be a flat surface. But take that out, I can't be around balloons. If I'm around a balloon, I will literally stop breathing, like instantly, basically.

Jade: I went into North Lakes the other day, 'cause I live in Brisbane, and they had balloons for Peters Ice Cream. I don't know why, but I literally did the whole walk in the door, walk out the door. 'Cause I was like, "I don't wanna die today. I'm pretty good. Thanks for that."

Jan: That's, that's the most difficult part. Like, see, that's why I had to remind everyone, just because you have a disability doesn't mean, you know, you can speak on behalf of everyone who has a disability.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: I do not have the rights to speak on behalf of everyone and neither should you.

Jade: Yeah. And like de-, spina bifida is known as the snowflake disability-

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: ... because no two snowflakes are ever the same.

Jan: Yeah. Same with POTS, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, um, narcolepsy, all these medical conditions I have. It's... Yeah. Nobody has the exact same presentation and I think people forget that disability is a spectrum.

Jade: Exactly. We are all on a spectrum somewhere.

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: And for me, like a lot of my, um, disabilities was being put down... Like a lot of my sensory needs and stuff like that was being putting down to, "Oh, you have spina bifida," when in fact no, it's like, "No, I'm, I'm on the spectrum."

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: So like, you know, just because I have one disability doesn't mean you need to close the book on all the other things.

Jan: Yes, exactly. They're not mutually exclusive. That's another thing I've had to tell people about that, you know, people, they don't realize that there is intersectionality everywhere.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: It's not just race, gender, class. It's also within like ra- within race, there is still intersectionality. Within gender, there is still intersectionality and within disability, there are, there is intersectionality as well.

Jade: Absolutely. Going back to your projects again, what has been your favorite project piece of advocacy that you've done so far?

Jan: Ah, that's a good question. So I think that would be the bake sale fundraiser I am coordinating for the flood victims in New South Wales on behalf of my friend who is one of the flood victims there.

Jade: Yeah. That's a big thing.

Jan: Yes.

Jade: Um, I have fa-... Well, not my... It's not directly my family. It's my husband's family. All live in new south Wales. And, you know, knowing how hard Brisbane was hit just with three days rain, that was a lot.

Jan: Yes.

Jade: Um, and coming from Bundaberg, 'cause that's where I originally came from, um, and all the flood, that way flood for me just is PTSD. Like I ju-... (laughs)

Jan: I know, and the worst part of it was like I know some people there are disabled, um, terminal, you know, terminally ill, chronically ill. Like how would they escape from the floods? That's, you know-

Jade: That's exactly right.

Jan: Yeah. And for the government to not declare an emergency response, it's just crazy.

Jade: I don't understand that at all.

Jan: Like, and my... I know my friend... I know people who have had to evacuate on their own and they've had to pay on their own just to protect themselves, like to get... You want a motel to stay in for a few nights to keep yourself safe from the floods? Well, good luck. You gotta pay first or you got... Or you get no place to stay.

Jade: Exactly. And I mean, people are losing their homes-

Jan: Yes.

Jade: ... in the middle of one of the biggest rental crisis we've ever seen in Australia, and the government's-

Jan: Yes. And now their homes-

Jade: ... and the government's like, "Okay, cool."

Jan: Yeah. And their homes are being destroyed.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: And the thing is like, for example, Lismore, Lismore was underwater. It was already bad-

Jade: Yes.

Jan: ... but now they're being underwater the second time, is just... Oh.

Jade: (laughs) I, I do, I do agree. One of my friends from Mad-, well, the one that lives over in Canada, Madison, she said to me, "Australia is a wild place. It's either burning or it's flooded."

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: And I was like, "You aren't wrong. Like I have to say from someone who lives in the country, you aren't wrong."

Jan: Yeah. But I also hope it, you know, with my fundraiser, it helps to raise awareness on why there... You know, these climate issues are actually pretty intersectional.

Jade: Exactly.

Jan: It's not, it's not just a climate issue. It's also a disabled person's issue, because imagine if you are disabled, you are stuck in a flood. How are you going to get yourself to safety if you cannot, you know, if you cannot see or if you cannot walk? You can't [crosstalk 00:31:36].

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: Yeah. How would you escape?

Jade: Well, it's like the, all the emergency warnings that were going over the TV and the radio. I was like, "I don't know about hearing impaired people and I don't know what's out there, but how are they meant to hear the warnings if it's on a TV-"

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: "... coming through a set of speakers-"

Jan: Yeah, exactly.

Jade: "... or on a radio?"

Jan: Yeah, exactly. Or, you know, even if they hear about it, it's like, "Okay, what do I do next? Who do I go to? Where do I go to? What-"

Jade: That's exactly right. Like it's just insane, the amount... And, and like you said, the fact that it wasn't declared an emergency-

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: ... still, I don't understand, but-

Jan: Yes. Not, not to downplay COVID. COVID is definitely an emergency, but-

Jade: Absolutely.

Jan: ... but you can see the double standards here. (laughs)

Jade: Yeah. And, and that goes back to, again, people not taking notice.

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: Right? Like outta sight, outta mind.

Jan: Yes. Or, you know, people, um, just... Sometimes people just don't care in general. Like I was actually screamed at by a student officer for (laughing) fundraising at the Union House.

Jade: Oh my God.

Jan: I, I kid you not. (laughs)

Jade: Oh my goodness.

Jan: (laughs) I was in the wheelchair, okay? I could not enter the room easily because the room was quite narrow. The officers were at the front-

Jade: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jan: ... so I was like... I had to get my friend to help that, to help ask them on my behalf. Um, at that time there was only one officer and they were like... Okay, there wa- there's no issue. Um, we made it clear to everyone, all the students at the event. It was really just a collective, honestly.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: We were fundraising for flood victims and we are not affiliated with any organization. Two officers just came in, got really angry and the officer just screamed at me saying I cannot fundraise here because I have no rights to-

Jade: Oh my goodness.

Jan: ... and I have to get out.

Jade: Oh my...

Jan: Yes.

Jade: Well, yeah-

Jan: Oh, and [crosstalk 00:33:43].

Jade: ... humanity amazes me again.

Jan: I know. And the best part was they basically said, "You... Because their first officer couldn't say no, we had to tell you to leave and it made us look bad." (laughs)

Jade: Oh my goodness.

Jan: I know. It... Uh, this is actually... You know, there's something called toxic activism. I think that's one of the... That's another challenge for disability activism and activism in general to-

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:34:15] activists.

Jade: Yeah. And I mean-

Jan: So it's a thing.

Jade: And it's all about... I ha- I, I have to be very careful with how I word my next sentence.

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: Um, it's all about the right voices speaking up.

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: You know what I mean? Like I'm not saying that people shouldn't talk. Talk.

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: Keep talking, but it's about the rise, the right people being heard because you get one person that says something on Twitter with the wrong hashtag-

Jan: Oh God.

Jade: ... and it's like wildfire.

Jan: Yeah. That's the thing. It's like, you know, just like, um, the officer, the first officer did defend us and talk to one of the staff, and she just looked at them in shock. Like, "This is not a reason to kick a student out." Like you, you have to look at the cause."

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: I mean, it's for a... It's a fucking... It's just a cookie fundraiser for the flood victims. (laughs)

Jade: Exactly. Exactly.

Jan: What? (laughs)

Jade: Oh, yeah. Lastly, what are you, what are you achieving in 2022, both in your personal life and activism? Tell us about your upcoming projects.

Jan: Okay. So I am going to be an intern as a Project Officer at Multicultural Women Victoria sometime this year.

Jade: That's exciting.

Jan: It is. I'm also taking up martial arts, you know, because... And acting classes. I'm actually performing in, um, a comedy show by Comedy on the Rocks Theater for Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

Jade: Oh, that's really cool.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:35:52] Yes. I'm performing, uh, this weekend. So I'm excited.

Jade: Are you nervous?

Jan: Um, I've already started performing last week, so I think the nerves they've gone down because I'm used to being on stage at this point.

Jade: Yeah. So do you do a lot with acting and stuff like that, Jan?

Jan: Yes. Yes I do.

Jade: That's so awesome.

Jan: And sometimes I use acting as a way to talk, to raise awareness on issues. Like I've been featured on campaign videos such as the, the international, such as the Exploitation of International Students by Workforce.

Jade: Yeah. I, I have seen it and I was like... I didn't realize it was you actually, when I was interviewing, I'm gonna be completely honest. And then I was doing my own research and basically, and it came up and I was like, "Huh, no way."

Jan: (laughs) Yes, that was me.

Jade: Yeah. I was like, "Oh, that's really cool." Do you have any life hacks for people with disabilities? Anything.

Jan: Uh, life hacks. Um, okay. Let me think. Okay. With the wheelchair, this is to all my fellow wheelchair users who are new for the first time. If you ever want to come up on a steep hill, okay? Please use the back of your wheels first. Wh-... You know, wheel yourself backwards. Not forward, backwards. I learned this-

Jade: Absolutely.

Jan: I learned this the hard way. I actually fell backwards on my chair because of this.

Jade: Yep.

Jan: Take my advice seriously. It's not fun when you fall backwards on your chair because it's basically like a turtle being flipped backwards on [crosstalk 00:37:37].

Jade: (laughs) I shouldn't laugh at that bit. Yeah.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:37:41].

Jade: Yeah. It is.

Jan: (laughing) It is, it's kinda, it's like... Yes, it's horrible. But I mean, I think I can laugh about it because, you know, it already happened to me (laughs).

Jade: Yep.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:37:50] like whatever. (laughs)

Jade: Yeah. It's happened to me than once. Like I've, I've gone on backward balance to go up a gutter and I've hit a rock the wrong way, and then I've gone, "Ah, yep. Cool. Now I'm backwards." You know what I mean? Like-

Jan: Yes. And also make sure nothing is in the way of your wheels. Do-

Jade: Yes.

Jan: Do not, do not put your jacket at the back of your seat, especially if it can slip through the crack and get stuck in your wheels.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: Trust me, that's not gonna be a pleasant experience.

Jade: I think the other thing for me is seat belts are really underrated in wheelchairs too. Like-

Jan: [crosstalk 00:38:26] Yes.

Jade: I don't think many... I don't see many people with seatbelt in wheelchairs and I'm like-

Jan: Why? (laughs)

Jade: ... why? Why not? Like... (laughs)

Jan: I, I remember using my wheelchair for the first time, I just ended up screaming and the pavements were a nightmare. I was like, "How do people in wheelchairs do this?"

Jade: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah [crosstalk 00:38:46].

Jan: I mean, yes, um, you get used to it eventually, but uh, I wouldn't recommend doing it every day. If possible just get somebody to drive you to places, especially if you are going somewhere where it's steep or there are terrible pavements with a lot of camber and holes. Just, yeah.

Jade: Yeah.

Jan: [crosstalk 00:39:09].

Jade: So the big cities.

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: That's... Yep. That's one of them. Like for me, wheelchair-ing around the middle of Brisbane-

Jan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jade: ... no, thank you. Nope.

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: I would just rather not do that. And also for me what's terrifying, being in a wheelchair on a train.

Jan: Oh God, that is the worst.

Jade: I never thought about this in my... Like in my mind on how terrifying that is, but it is horrifying.

Jan: It is.

Jade: And I like, I like adrenaline and doing insane things, but that's just...

Jan: And the worst part is you have to be on the right side of the platform because if you're on the wrong side of the platform, the train driver is just gonna ignore you and drive off.

Jade: Exactly.

Jan: It, it's happened to me so many times. I just cried and had multiple breakdowns over it.

Jade: Yeah. It... I definitely feel like there needs to be more... That's another thing that is lacking in the world-

Jan: Yeah.

Jade: ... but another change for another day. (laughs) Thank you so much, Jan, for talking to me today, I appreciate it. I look forward to seeing your work. I hope your stage show goes really well and your cooking sale goes really well.

Jan: Oh, thank you.

Jade: Thank you from WWDA for coming today.

Jan: Thank you so much for having me here, Jade and Heidi. (singing)