

[Music] [Narelle] Good morning, afternoon, evening. Wherever you are in this world, to the latest episode of the Digital Access Show. Joining us today are a couple, Sally and Amir Meshel. We heard from Amir last week talking about real estate and ways for people to get their own accommodation, and he gave us some really great tips. This week, I really want to focus on what Sally does, because I'm very passionate about the industry that Sally's in. Sally, can you take us, tell us a bit about what you do? [Sally] Hi, Narelle. I started my journey probably about 15 years ago as a teacher, early childhood teacher. And that was firstly with my diploma of childcare that I first did when I was 19. And then I ventured across the world as a nanny and did a bit of experience of nannying with different families, and ventured the world with Canada and London. I then came back and did my early childhood degree at 25 as a mature age student, and graduated in about 2010. And then from 2010 till now, so the last 15 years, I've.. pretty much just found my... ended up here, finding my niche in special education due to the experiences that I've had working with all the different abilities, and behaviours and tailoring, y'know, wanting to sort of tailor into assisting the children as much as I can with their needs and wants. So, I'm currently working as a special education teacher in a support unit in a mainstream setting.

[Narelle] Wonderful. One of the things that always fascinates me, I've got two autistic sons, Amir is aware of that. I think you've met one of them. I'm not sure Amir, I can't remember now. But one of the things that fascinated me when they were going through school, so I've got one son that he likes to say is normal, but I'll say, yeah, well, you know, when most of your family have got a disability, what's normal? The education system back when they were going through school, one of the things that struck me was special ed teachers really did try hard. But.. the resources really weren't there. Digital accessibility, even down to catering for the particular needs of really full-on children on the neurodivergent spectrum. What is it like today? [Sally] I think with the technologies and how it is sort of 2024 now, there's those ways that you're able to access technologies through iPads, which have different apps, applications called LAMP, which stands for language acquisition and motor planning. They've also got ProLo2Go, which is another avenue, and you've got other ones, like even as simple as GoTalk, which involves visuals being inserted into a machine. I think too that in terms of like, catering for people who have different disabilities in regards to vision impaired or autism, anything, you know, anything it is, [Narelle] Yeah. [Sally] is the fact also that when people don't have access to an iPad and the technicalities of it, you can also do a low-tech version, so, which is what we implement in the classroom. So the idea is you take - with the access of a screenshot of the iPad screen, and then you can laminate that, but you could also put even Braille or, you know, it's pretty much like a photocopy of the iPad screen. [Narelle] Okay, yep. [Sally] Yeah, so you're able to... y'know there's always a way, and I think that in special education, which I sort of, I'm continuing to sort of get through in regards to like the 'should' versus reality. So we just most recently just at work last week had a situation where we had to evacuate the classroom due to something happening. And the admin people came in and just, you know, had the expectation that we needed just to move out of the classroom. So there's no phone call to say... you know, like, any sort of warning in regards to that. So, and I think that with kids with disabilities - they need that processing time. So, you know, it's just that sort of... I think that also with inclusion and inclusivity, the idea is it's also a 'should' versus reality thing as well. So, you know, you can say that you're inclusive, but actually you need to be actioning the fact you're inclusive rather than just talking

about it. [Narelle] Yeah, and that's been my experience as well. You know, particularly, I used to know with my sons when they got relief teachers. And, it was always a real stress. I could always pick when a relief teacher been there because my son would have had a really bad day because if, you know, it happens, this is life. [Sally] Yeah. [Narelle] But he couldn't - particularly the one that's very highly, you know, neurodivergent, high on the autistic spectrum. He couldn't cope with that change in teacher. And the teacher really struggled to cope with him. Because obviously the teacher suddenly got this child that has a bit of garbled speech, maybe. You know, has very set ideas. And, you know, very, very routine oriented children, where the normal classroom teacher is very aware of those routines. And can handle it. A relief teacher really struggles. [Narelle] What supports are there for the teacher in those situations and for the child so the child can still have a successful day at school, and the teacher can have a successful day? [Sally] Yeah, I totally agree with the fact that the routine and, you know, when I have to be replaced in regards- if it's so if I'm still on site or if I have a sick day or whatever. I think that... I'm getting tingles from how passionate I am about this. [Narelle] [laughs] [Sally] Because I'm in a really great workplace at the moment in regards to like, I'm highly, highly supported with my assistant principal and the other teachers around me. So with that, I have that approach. When I am on site and I am being replaced by the casual teacher, I pretty much just say things, you know, like I've got the day plan organized for the children. [Narelle] Yep. [Sally] And, you know, in terms of the curriculum side of things. But I also say, look, y'know, in terms of the behavior side. And like if, you know, as you said, like in terms of the routine and the changes and things that they may experience. So the idea is for the casual just to enjoy their day... And, um.. Just sort of, if you can't get work done, it's not a be all and end all. Like just enjoy it. Make sure that you sort of, sort of cater to the children's needs and then worry about the work. [Narelle] Okay. [Sally] Which I think that... Verbally communicating the fact that they do have that support. You know, that they're able to call, like don't ever say, for them not feel as though they can't call for support. [Narelle] Yep. [Sally] And then if things were to escalate in the classroom, there's support things in place in regards to, a phone call's made. Executive staff come in to assist. You know, it's sort of, just depending on scenario depends on the action. But there's, yeah, I feel rest assured knowing that I can verbally communicate, whoever comes onto my class and that they're rest assured knowing that we have their backs. [Narelle] What about on the children's side? How do you manage those changes with the children? [Sally] Um.. [Narelle] From their point of view. [Sally] I think that... I mean, once again, when I said that.. It's probably a bit trickier in regards to... I think with the communication with the adults in the room. Just to tell, because if I'm physically not, their and able to tell the children that I'm not going to be there or things like that. It's sort of just to tell my teachers aide or SLSO. You know, Sally's not here because of, you know, if they ask or if they're nonverbal and they, you know sort of read their signs. They're upset or whatever. So it's just reading their cues and working out what's needed at the time. So it's all sort of... and I find that with special education in particular, no day is the same. So, you know, there's no sort of... routine answer for how things can happen. Because, you know, sort of it's quite sort of... You have to be flexible and go with the flow. [Amir] If I can say something, Narelle, on that. Obviously I'm speaking- my, my beautiful bride. [Narelle & Sally] [laughs] [Amir] I'm speaking as a doting husband. But what I've seen in the Sally's 15 years is Sally was the relief teacher. So Sally's actually

taught at 33 schools around New South Wales. [Narelle] Oh wow. [Amir] So when you have a period of time of 15 years, and you have- you handle so many different personalities. Think about it in your normal day when you're meeting new people. If you're in a closed workshop, you might work with the three same people all the time. A school teacher, like Sally for example, a class might have between 10 and 25 students. [Narelle] Yes. [Amir] But if you're teaching at 33 different schools, you've been across at least a thousand to 2000 students. [Narelle] That's a really good point, yeah. [Amir] So when you see a behavior, you can very quickly adjust to it, to find out, first of all, why? Which is quite often written down in a manual when there's the handover. So you walk in and there's a communication book. [Narelle] Yeah. [Amir] And Sally, before she takes a day off, if she needs to have a day off or she has a day in lieu, she writes and communicates before she leaves in the folder so that the, the relief teacher, all the teachers coming into that classroom knows where the progress is every year. Now Sally won't tell you this because she's too modest. [Sally] Aw. [laughs] [Amir] But what I've heard, I've heard from the families that have their children at a special needs school, at an SSP, which is school for a special purpose. At one of Sally schools, now she's working in a mainstream school, but in a special class. At the end of the year when the children have been with her for one whole year. The home communication, the way that they talk to each other, to their son, to their daughter within their siblings, within their whole family unit is so much softer, so much more peaceful. Because you realize there will be days where things spike, but you also realize that there's a routine, there's answers. So every day is different, there's no set routine. But when you have a great teacher and you have great support from the school, from the assistant principal, from the principal, and the other teachers towards a support unit. By the end of the year, you're making massive progress to a family, not just to the child, but to the child and their family. It brings families closer together. So I thought I'd say that because Sally's too modest to say that about herself. [Narelle & Sally] [overlapping] [Sally] Sorry, I would like to quickly say too, that we've just had a new student start recently as well. And he's, they've come from a bit of a sort of difficult situation. And so now they're in a, hopefully, in a support setting where they're going to be more supported and well catered for in regards to the smaller class size and more support. And just recently, it was last week. So the boy is on, sort of partial attendance at the moment, sort of as a gradual process of transferring to the school. And the mum, who I see, have been seeing every morning, she says to me, oh, you know, I apologize for my child being so hard. And I said, oh, no, it's not hard. We just have to work with him. You know, like sort of get his needs met. Anyway, so she came to pick him up two hours later or whatever. And she's like, Sally, you know, you really made my day with what you said this morning. And I said, oh, what was that? Because I couldn't remember. [Narelle & Sally] [laughs] [Sally] And then she said, when you said that my child's not hard to work with, I said, well, he's not. You know, it's the idea of like working out how you can help. Assess him, you know, have the accessibility of like what he needs. And treating like human rather than somebody's too hard. [Narelle] That's it. I think for my son, one of the best conversations I ever had, he was still in primary school. The deputy principal happened to be walking past one day. And she was the deputy principal of special ed as well. And she said to me, oh, oh, geez, he's got that AFL down pat. And I said, yep. And she said, what about the cricket? And I said oh, he loves cricket. I saw her the next day she said, holy smokes, we just had the best conversation. And she, she said, he and I walked around the school for half an hour

talking about the latest game. And then she was behind him and she was backing him. So if there was for some reason he had to write a story, he was able to write a story about the football game on the weekend or the cricket game. And they would get what they needed, which is his, not that his spelling and grammar and punctuation were graded. [Narelle] But he was learning, and that's fine! [Sally] Yeah. [Narelle] But he was able to do it. Mind you, they would get reams and reams of paper, Ackermanis has kicked to Vos, and Vos kicked the, you know, because he had that ability. He could remember all the play. Or if it was the cricket, Oh, Warnie bowled a Googler and bowled out whoever it was. And it kept him interested that way. And the school teacher, the classroom teacher was great. As soon as she picked up, it was no problem. She just said, oh, Nick, you just write about the cricket game, because he has, he didn't have the imagination to go and make a story up. He didn't know where to start. So just those little things for him, and it made such a difference for him for that year. It was just the best year for him. And I've never forgotten those two ladies, because it was just those two little tricks. He was connected. He was enabled. He was one of the class. He wasn't any different. And it was just, it worked. And I think that's one of the things that I always find. We're just normal people aren't we? Everyone's normal. It's just a different version of normal. Everyone's different. [Sally] It's just being open to that as well, rather than being inside a box and saying, oh, this is too hard. You just have to be... I think it's just the awareness of how people are. [Narelle] Yeah. [Sally] You know, bring them in and let's help, rather than, Oh yeah, that's too hard for me. I'm not going to help you. [Narelle] That's it. Sally, what are a couple of takeaways that you could give to parents of children with disability in this area? [Sally] Um, I think just breathe, relax. So they have it, have this, you know, the whole 'you've got this' approach. [Narelle] Yeah. [Sally] And I think that, you know, they're... that they're doing the best that they can with the devices and the, you know, the resources that they have. And I think that they just also need it to be reiterated the fact that they do, you know, not to feel shame about reaching out and just feel as though there's a big support network out there to help them. [Narelle] Yeah. And really, communication is the key, isn't it? In both areas that we've talked about over the last two weeks with real estate, and with education, it really is about communication. [Sally] Yeah. And I think too, with that that note as well, with what Amir and you've talked about with the real estate of how, you know, we have Australia. And then every state is different, with the real estate and different, you know, terms and conditions. Well, education is the same. So we have technically the Australian curriculum. And then we have within the States, we have the New South Wales syllabus and then, but then, like, for example, if a family was to move up to Queensland, their schooling then changed with the education, so. And I think that's a lot to do with, you know, yes, we have the Australian curriculum, but I think that we still need to- yes, it's 2024, but we're still a long way off actually making that more inclusive to make sure Australia as a whole is all, I think, uniform in approach rather than... Because.. depending, unless you really read into it, I mean, it's really quite confusing in regards to what state does what. [Narelle] Yeah, and as a parent of children, we don't have that time to read into those things. And often, as Amir said, you know, with terminology, the same thing can mean so many different things. What, together, is one other message that you could give to anyone listening to this show that are so called normal people. What would you say to all of them? [Narelle] About the areas you've been talking about [Amir] So the first thing that I would say is don't reinvent the wheel. There's already so many things that make your life

easier, So don't try to do everything from scratch, find somebody who succeeded at where you want to go, learn from their systems and ask them how much, how quickly and how easy. [Narelle] Mm. Sally? [Sally] Yeah, I think just reiterating the fact of.. just the support network that's available. So with children thriving, not so much kids with disabilities, but also sort of in a mainstream setting that when the therapy is on board, when the teacher's on board, and when the parents are on board, the children thrive. It's like driving a car. You need four wheels to drive a car. You need the three areas, the domains to make sure the children thrive, as soon as one falls off. It's sort of, yes, the process is gradual, but it doesn't really go anywhere when the three people or three sort of, three areas collaborate. [Narelle] Amir, Sally Meshel, thank you. Sally, how can people contact you if they want to keep talking about what your passion is, which is education? [Sally] I think the best contact is probably via email, via DET email, or by phone number? [Narelle] Yep. [Sally and Amir] [overlapping] [Narelle] Do you want to give it? [Sally] Sorry, what's that? [Narelle] Do you want to give it, and I'll put it in the end? [Sally] Yes, I'll use my DET email. [Narelle] Yep. [Sally] It's sally.meshel@det.nsw.edu.au [Narelle] Thank you. I really can't thank you both enough for being on for the last couple of weeks. And just.. the things I learn every time I do this show, it just amazes me. And I'm really appreciative. So, that's another episode of the Digital Access Show. And if you like what we do, please like, share, subscribe, review, Google review. Take your pick. And tune in next time. I'm Narelle from the Digital Access Show. [Sally] Thank you. [Narelle] See you. Bye-bye. [Sally] Bye. [Music]