

20 November 2019

**International Day of People with Disability**   
  
When disability advocate Jax Jacki Brown prepares for a speaking engagement, thinking back to her younger days helps ease any nerves.

Jax – who will be guest speaker at Surf Coast Shire Council’s International Day of People with Disability event on Thursday 5 December – is interested in how two parts of her identity intersect, being queer and being a wheelchair user.

“I had a friend at uni who also had a disability, and it was then that I started to think about what it really meant,” she said. “I didn’t really know anyone who was queer and had a disability, not even in the media, so I didn’t know how my future might look as a queer, disabled person.

“When I feel nervous about talking at events, I always think about that young person I once was who didn’t have someone talking about these experiences, and how great it would have been.”

The disability and LGBTIQA+ rights activist will headline Council’s free community International Day of People with Disability event, which also features all abilities band The Rockheads and lunch by dal Catering, which provides training and employment opportunities for people with a disability.

Jax will share personal stories to highlight that disability is a social issue.

“When I picked up my first book on the disability rights movement, it reframed the problem from being a personal one to being a social one,” she said.

“Growing up in regional New South Wales, there were a lot of places that I couldn’t access with my friends. When I stopped feeling like it was my fault, I realised that these places should be providing alternative access.

“There are so many people impacted – people with disabilities, people with prams, older people. When I started to notice that, it enabled me to feel like I wasn’t alone. I didn’t feel ashamed of who I was. I felt proud of being different; I felt proud of who I was.”

Building pride, resilience and community for people with disabilities is a focus for Jax, who has an opportunity to do so as a recently-appointed member of the Victorian Disability Advisory Council.

“Part of our initial task is to review the current state disability plan which ends in 2020. We will also be planning the future state disability plan,” she said. “It’s a huge task. I feel a responsibility to LGBTIQA+ people with disabilities, and how they can be embraced in this plan.”  
  
Guests at the International Day of People with Disability event will hear first-hand insights about access and inclusion barriers.

“Often people will see the accessible sign on a bus or a tram or a building and think it’s OK but people don’t realise there are still many barriers, and that we can’t access many things people take for granted,” Jax said.

“When I moved to Melbourne, I got onto a tram in the middle of the city and I thought I had the opportunity to go where everyone else was going. But they don’t all have accessible stops. So I can get onto trams, but I can’t always get off.

“It’s great that we’re having conversations that highlight some of these issues. Change is slowly happening.”

Jax hopes people will leave the International Day of People with Disability event seeing the world differently.

“I hope the stories I’m going to share are interesting and I hope I can make them a little bit funny,” she said. “I also think they’re relevant to everyone. If you’re lucky enough to live long enough, it’s likely you are going to acquire a disability. Ninety per cent of older people have some type of impairment. It might not be something you experience now but it’s something you might experience as your body and mind change.”

Surf Coast Shire Council Mayor Rose Hodge invited everyone to attend the International Day of People with Disability event on Thursday 5 December.

“By being there, you can help create an inclusive community where everyone can participate and contribute,” Cr Hodge said. “I’m excited to hear from Jax, rock out to The Rockheads and support dal Catering.”

The event is in Council Chambers, Torquay from 12noon to 2pm. People are asked to RSVP before 5pm Tuesday 26 November via **www.scsidpwd2019.eventbrite.com.au** or phone **5261 0600**.

**Not for publication:**

**For further information**

Kate Fowles, Communications Officer (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday)

5261 0564 | 0428 436 489

Sarah Gleeson, Communications Officer (Monday, Thursday, Friday)

5261 0564