

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE – PUBLIC SECTOR UNEARTHED

EPISODE #1

BRINGING PUBLIC SERVICE STORIES TO LIFE

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

CAROLINE WALSH: I think it's really important that we hear from the voices of people that maybe we don't get to hear from very often. We don't get to amplify their voices and hear their perspectives. And I think it's really important that we do know about the small-scale things that might be making a big impact, the things that people are doing that are shaping the landscape of the public service, the small 'R' reforms that are happening on the ground at the coalface in big and small ways that make a difference for people at work, for those people that are working in the public sector, but also making a difference for the individuals and communities that they're serving.

ANNA RYAN: The APS has a lot of stories to be proud of, so I really want other people to hear those stories as well. I want us to feel proud of the work that we do as public servants.

BROCK PHYLAND: Welcome to Public Sector Unearthed, a Work with Purpose spinoff about the people who drive grassroots change in the public service. My name is Brock Phyland and I'm a director of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and I'm joined behind the mic by Megan, who is my co-host.

MEGAN APONTE-PAYNE: Thanks, Brock. It's great to be here. I'm Megan Aponte-Payne, and I'm the lead for International Supply Chains at the Department of Industry, Science and Resources. As you can tell by the name and the new intro music, this subseries is something a little different from your usual Work with Purpose experience. On Unearthed, we'll listen to people's stories and showcase public servants who are achieving grassroots cultural change and reform. This could be through initiatives in leadership and mentoring or communities of practice, diversity and inclusion networks, and the effective promotion of the values and purpose of the public sector.

BROCK PHYLAND: The voices you just heard are those of Caroline Walsh, IPAA ACT CEO and public Servant of over 20 years, as well as Anna Ryan Head of communications and engagement at the Australian Public Service Commission. Anna was previously head of Communications and Engagement at the APS Reform Office. Today's episode is to give you a little taster of what's to come. We'll talk through how public servants are driving grassroots change and how leadership can best support them, and tease what our first

conversation might be about. Let's tune into the conversation now. Caroline, it's so great to have you for this Uearthed conversation, our very first one. In a few words, could you tell us how you got into the public service and then into IPAA?

CAROLINE WALSH:

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Brock. Look, I would call myself a deliberate public servant. I know a lot of people refer to themselves as accidental public servants. They kind of came in, did a short stint, and then loved it, and stayed. I'm the reverse of that. I'm a really passionate and purposeful public servant, and it started because I was interested in public policy. I was interested in politics, but I didn't want to be a politician. I wasn't cut out for door stops and question time, but I did really want to have an impact on people.

So, when it occurred to me that I could be a public servant and that I could help people through the mechanisms of public policy and service delivery, I was hooked. So, I applied for a graduate position and I was lucky enough to join the public service as a graduate and I stayed, and I loved it, and I have created a really interesting and meaningful career for myself. And now as the CEO of IPAA, I am so privileged to be able to help other people create meaningful lives in the public sector and be able to do the things that they love, but with the tools and the support that they need in order to do that.

MEGAN APONTE-PAYNE:

That's fantastic. It sounds like almost the best of both worlds. And you, Anna, what brought you to the public service?

ANNA RYAN:

I'm probably the opposite of Caroline. I'm definitely an accidental public servant, and I ended up living in Darwin and working in the Northern Territory government. And just by chance I applied for a job at the local Centrelink head office and ended up getting that job. And it just led me to such a range of incredible opportunities and experiences, meeting the most dedicated set of people, working under extraordinary circumstances to support people across the Northern Territory. I got to do crazy things like fly in a tiny, tiny plane to a remote community to do filming.

I ran a drive to collect sporting gear and took it out to another community and got to take part in a community festival. Anyway, I was just blown away by the dedication of the people working in there and it led me on to a lifelong passion for the people that work in the Australian Public Service and the great work that they are doing, and they often go unnoticed or unheard, and I just think this podcast is going to be such a fantastic opportunity to bring some of those incredible stories to light.

MEGAN APONTE-PAYNE:

That makes total sense. No way better to be if you want to work with people, I don't think. Caroline, Uearthed will be all about

grassroots change and people who perhaps started a book club or work with communities to improve services for those with a disability. Why do you think it's so crucial that we talk about these things?

CAROLINE WALSH:

I think it's really important that we hear from the voices of people that maybe we don't get to hear from very often. We don't get to amplify their voices and hear their perspectives. And I think it's really important that we do know about the small-scale things that might be making a big impact, the things that people are doing that are sort of shaping the landscape of the public service, the small R reforms that are happening on the ground at the coalface in big and small ways that make a difference for people at work, for those people that are working in the public sector, but also making a difference for the individuals and communities that they're serving.

And I'm really interested in hearing stories from individuals and how they bring their purpose and passion to work every day and what drives them because the public sector is so varied, there are so many different things going on, and I think sometimes we all get stuck a little bit in our day-to-day work and hearing the stories of other people and bringing to life the huge diversity of the public sector, I think is going to be fascinating and I'm really excited to hear those really personal stories from people.

BROCK PHYLAND:

Brilliant. Fantastic, Caroline. And I guess, Anna, so the topics we'll discuss on Unearthed are very closely linked with APS Reform and particularly its focus on putting people and business at the core of policy and services. With, I guess, your career theme of people and relationships, how have you seen public servants make a difference at that grassroots level in just your day-to-day work?

ANNA RYAN:

I've been really lucky, I think. Just recently, even I've got to meet some really inspiring people and people doing really, really great work. So yeah, I'm really excited as well about being able to bring those stories to more people so that they can hear that as well. I think the APS has a lot of stories to be proud of, so I really want other people to hear those stories as well. I want us to feel proud of the work that we do as public servants.

So, I guess when thinking about, "Well, what are people already doing to make a difference?" There are people all around the country who are already reforming the APS through the work that they're doing, so people that are helping vulnerable Australians to get back on their feet or people that are coming up with new ideas of how to improve services or really getting into challenging topics to deliver better policy. And that work is all part of APS Reform. It's not just about a set of priorities and a structured list of things, it's

actually about the people who are on the ground making a difference, and they're doing that already.

BROCK PHYLAND:

I love that. And it's that core principle of public servants. We're here to serve the public and we'll hopefully be hearing a lot of those unsung heroes, the stories of people who are doing the doing in that day-to-day. And I guess building off of what Anna's just said, Caroline, can you tell us about maybe a standout initiative in your time in the public service that drove that bottom-up change?

CAROLINE WALSH:

I'm really happy to say that through the lens of IPAA, I get to see amazing stories all the time, and particularly through our Spirit of Service Awards, we get to see some of the best initiatives across the public sector and get to share the successes and celebrate that with particularly teams across the public sector. But I've got to say, there is one that has really stood out for me, and it was a winner of one of the categories at the awards last year, and that was the team from DSS that put together the National Disability Strategy, and it's a 10-year strategy. It was a huge piece of work, and they really did some amazing work working with people with disability, really understanding their lived experiences, connecting, and doing amazing outreach to lobby groups, to peak groups, to advocates, carers, employers, and others to really understand what was missing in the existing strategy and what would make a difference to people, what could actually be changed.

And the work that they did in that consultation phase and then bringing that to life was so uplifting for me. I had, myself, done some similar work when I was at the Public Service Commission. I was part of a cross-agency team that pulled together the APS Disability Strategy, and that was a huge piece of work, thinking about how we could improve employment outcomes for people with disability in the public service, but seeing it done at a larger, more intense scale for the National Disability Strategy. And as a parent of someone with a disability, it really had a very personal connection for me as well. But seeing the work that team did was so special, and I think it really shines a light on how the APS is truly changing the way we do engagement with community and with the people who will be impacted by the work that we do.

MEGAN APONTE-PAYNE:

That's awesome to hear about, Caroline, and I think about my own experience on a panel at the moment and just seeing the recruitability option, for example. I think that's making such a big difference, so it's great to see it on the ground. And while grassroots change is so important, Anna, what can leaders at the higher level of the public service like you and Caroline at that SES level do to support staff like Brock and I to drive grassroots change

or perhaps to start an initiative on a topic that we care deeply about?

ANNA RYAN:

I think one of the most important things that leaders can do is to create an environment of trust and of safety for staff so that they can innovate, and they can feel confident in bringing new ideas forward and not be afraid to make mistakes. And I feel that we're creating a culture of innovation and trust more in the APS. I can see that happening already. People around the APS have got such great ideas and we really want to hear from people on the ground about what we can do better and what we can do differently.

MEGAN APONTE-PAYNE:

Thanks very much, Caroline and Anna, for joining us on Uearthed today. I know I speak for Brock as well when I say that it's been really great to hear some of your insights and it just makes me so excited for what's to come in this podcast series. Listeners, we hope you enjoyed this short introduction to Uearthed. It's been exciting to hear about what Uearthed will be all about, and our first episode will launch in two weeks. We're excited to hear from Jayden Swain, who is an advisor for diversity and inclusion at Austrade. I don't want to spoil it too much, but Jayden will talk about how his life's journey has led him to the public service. He'll also talk about how helping staff to be more aware, and more understanding of diversity has become a calling for him, and how this is helping the public service to better support the communities around him. Make sure to send us any questions or inspiration you have for our podcasts to events@act.ipaa.org. Or you can contact us on LinkedIn via IPAA ACT, or via [contentgroup](https://www.contentgroup.com.au).

BROCK PHYLAND:

What are you keen to hear more about on Uearthed? Let us know by leaving a comment on our social media channels or even better, by writing a review. We're on Apple Podcast, Stitcher, Spotify, and many other podcast platforms.

MEGAN APONTE-PAYNE:

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BROCK PHYLAND:

Goodbye for now. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you again soon.