12-12:30 More Than Access: What the Bluey Campaign Reveals About Language, Belonging and Children's Media

Children's media is often treated as entertainment that sits outside the serious work of language development. Yet for young children, their favourite TV programs provide repeated and meaningful exposure to language: phrases are copied, stories are retold, characters enter imaginative play, and shared references become part of conversations with siblings, friends and classmates. This presentation offers a parent and family perspective on the successful campaign to make Bluey accessible to deaf children through Auslan interpretation. The campaign began with a simple question: why could a profoundly deaf Australian child not fully access one of the defining cultural experiences of her generation? More than 10,000 people supported the campaign, bringing families, Deaf community members and allies together, raising public awareness of the limitations of captions for young children who cannot yet read, and securing direct engagement with the ABC. The campaign ultimately helped achieve its central goal. Fifty Auslan-interpreted episodes of Bluey are now available on ABC iview. The result, however, extends well beyond one program. Within the changing ABC landscape, the Auslan children's catalogue has grown to include hundreds of interpreted episodes across at least eight series, alongside separately interpreted specials. The campaign provides a case study in how family-led advocacy can create direct action, build community awareness, influence institutional priorities and contribute to change across a wider media ecosystem. Using this experience as a lived-experience case study, the presentation will explore the relationship between media access, language acquisition and social participation. It will consider what is lost when a deaf child receives only partial access to the stories shared by siblings and peers—and what becomes possible when signed language is thoughtfully incorporated into mainstream children's content. The discussion will move beyond a binary choice between spoken and signed language. Our profoundly deaf daughter uses bilateral cochlear implants and is growing up bimodally bilingual in Auslan and spoken English. For children developing spoken language, visual language can provide an additional pathway to meaning, reduce the consequences of missed auditory information, and allow communication to continue when listening is effortful or unavailable. Accessible media can also give hearing parents, siblings and peers an engaging context in which to learn and use signs together. Rather than competing with spoken-language goals, it can contribute to a richer and more resilient language environment. The ABC's evolving approach also demonstrates the value of moving from accessibility added after production to inclusion embedded from the outset. Play School: Sensational Senses, developed with Deaf creatives,

writers, performers and Auslan professionals, shows what becomes possible when deaf children are understood not as an additional audience to be accommodated, but as part of the intended audience from the beginning. The central proposition is that inclusion in children's media is more than representation or access to entertainment. It can support incidental learning, family communication, identity, literacy, peer relationships and belonging. The Bluey campaign demonstrates how families, communities and broadcasters can help ensure deaf children gain both language and a place in the shared cultural conversation.

Bio: James Wright is a parent advocate and father of three, including Morgan, his profoundly deaf daughter, who uses bilateral cochlear implants and is growing up bimodally bilingual in Auslan and spoken English. James and his wife, Libby, launched the campaign for Auslan access to Bluey, attracting more than 10,000 supporters and building community awareness of language access in Australian children's media. His advocacy draws on his family's experience navigating cochlear implantation, early intervention, Auslan, Deaf community connection and mainstream education. James is interested in inclusive approaches that support language acquisition while ensuring deaf children participate fully in family, educational and cultural life.