# The Art of Inclusion Diversity Council Australia logoTranscript

## Season 2 - Episode 5 – Caring is sharing

## *Pioneering shared care policies in Australia’s workplaces*

### Catherine McNair

This is for us, a gender equality play. This is about, stop looking at the workplace and how do we make it more family friendly for women. But actually, how do we mainstream this as something that actually benefits both men and women.

### Lisa Annese

That's Catherine McNair, head of diversity and inclusion for QBE Insurance. She's making a point about how we've all been taught subtly or not, that men and women have predestined gender roles. Men are the breadwinners, women are the caregivers. But now a radical shift is taking place in QBE and other forward-thinking organisations across Australia. A shift that could change how work relates to gender and parenting forever.

I'm Lisa Annese, CEO of the Diversity Council Australia. And I'm your narrator for this episode, where we look at how we use parental leave in Australia to care for children, how this impacts both women and men, and how it can really benefit families.

First, I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land, to elders past, present, and emerging on whose country this recording is taking place. This is the Art of Inclusion, a podcast from the Diversity Council Australia or DCA. In our second series, we peer into the lives of fascinating people, whose individual stories create the tapestry of diversity that make up Australia and its workplaces.

Today the topic I'm excited to be discussing is shared care. A new model for taking parental leave at work. Many of Australia's leading businesses are re-imagining parental leave with policies that provide all parents with equal access to paid leave. Policies that use neutral language and move away from distinctions between primary and secondary carer. Because no carer is secondary when it comes to raising kids.

What's more, some companies are even providing paid parental leave for both parents when only one of them works for the company. While this typically doesn't cover the partner's entire salary, the money enables the parents to really share the care while minimising any financial fallout. One thing to note, while we recognise there are many types of care and many types of families in this episode, shared care is explored through the story of a heterosexual couple caring for their child. The good news is that shared care can be implemented regardless of your family situation. Let's find out more.

### Jacob Lindsay

So, my name's Jacob Lindsay. I work at Aurecon, which is a global engineering and advisory firm and in my lap I've got Arthur Lindsay who's an 11-month old and about three months ago I took up the shared care policy.

### Lisa Annese

Jacob is the Global Digital Leader for Advisory at Aurecon. A bit of a high flyer. But he still has access to his employer's policy.

### Jacob Lindsay

So if your child is before the age of one, you can take up to three months off. There's a few different models about it. There's a combination cares, which is what I'm doing. So I'm going into work one day a week and I've got four days, which I'm spending at home. It's fantastic. It gave my wife a chance to go back to work and continue her career. And that was really one of the main reasons why I took it up. As well as, I get to spend a bit more time with this little guy in my lap, who's probably been sitting here for a little bit too long.

### Lisa Annese

While Jacob is clear on the benefits shared care has brought, he's faced some challenges, especially around his changing role.

### Jacob Lindsay

It would've been the first couple of weeks when I was transitioning from a pretty intensive role to taking four days off a week and that transition was really hard. From going like full 120% work to your duties are completely different. That probably had the biggest impact.

### Lisa Annese

Jacob discovered many of the difficulties came from external gender expectations. He found himself a rare dad amongst a multitude of mums and this challenged his choices. It was as if being amongst all those mothers was society's way of telling him he was not welcome.

### Jacob Lindsay

So I'll go down to the local coffee shop to grab a coffee in the morning and it will be mums and their prams. Occasionally I'll see another dad with his pram in the street and we'll have that sort of instinctive like wink, as we walk past each other. Because we're both doing it. But while my wife Bec, while she was on leave for the first 10 months, she had mother's groups and a lot of her friends were also having kids at the same time. But for me, yeah, it is quite different.

### Lisa Annese

Jacob says that ultimately, the time he gets to spend with his son more than compensates this choice.

### Jacob Lindsay

I think the positive is I've got to spend a lot more time with Artie. Yeah, without this opportunity I wouldn't have been able to create the sort of bond that we've got now. And a lot of the time during the work year, I'll come home from work and I'll spend maybe an hour and then he'll go down to bed. And sometimes if I'm travelling during the week, I won't see him at all. So to have that time spent together is great.

### Lisa Annese

And he highly recommends shared care to other dads who might be considering it.

### Jacob Lindsay

I don't see any reason not to do it and I think you'll regret it if you don't take it on. The early days are precious and they go so quickly, so you don't want to miss out if given the opportunity.

### Lisa Annese

Beyond individual stories like Jacob's, it's interesting to know what drives organisations like Aurecon that are beginning to offer shared care. Here's Catherine McNair again, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at QBE Insurance. Another company leading the way in shared care.

### Catherine McNair

I think the shared care model is really enabling us to look at this as a bit of a game changer. I mean, if we look at the root cause of what we are trying to address here, I mean why even consider the concept of shared care? Is really looking at our workplaces and inclusive workplaces, but looking at some of those bold changes that are going to shift how we can accelerate inclusion and what that means for everyone in the workplace.

Fundamentally for us, it's about gender equality and I think we can look at how do you shift the dial on gender equality? A lot of conferences and articles will talk about making workplaces family friendly for women, and it actually calls out their gender, which I find really interesting. Where it's really a game changer, is looking at what could be the bold moves to actually mainstream caring and flexibility for men and women. So it actually becomes a non-issue, there's no career barriers there for either gender. It's really something that we're looking at from a holistic perspective.

### Lisa Annese

Catherine is clear on the business benefits of more flexible shared care models and of promoting them with well communicated campaigns like the one QBE ran in early 2019.

### Catherine McNair

In terms of the benefits, the brand obviously, the campaign itself was so well received. And we know from feedback, not only from our own employees, where our CHRO and other senior leaders received fantastic emails from our people, but where our employees have shared that with their friends. Even their own immediate family members, I think, we're quite staggered about the generosity of the scheme but also their friends. So where we have men who have now shared with us, they're going to be parenting every Monday for the next 50 weeks. Their friends are just in disbelief that there are organisations that are moving forward in this way and providing that connection with family.

### Lisa Annese

And of course, there are important benefits to employees and their families.

### Catherine McNair

One of the things we've been talking about a lot in our communications is around the benefits for holistic family well-being and I think importantly, mental health outcomes. So for family well-being, just enabling, removing those barriers where perhaps in the past men have just not seen themselves as being able to access policies.

### Lisa Annese

There are also financial savings to consider.

### Catherine McNair

You know, conservatively day care costs something between $140 to $200 these days, per day. So that's a significant impact.

### Lisa Annese

For the benefits to reach everyone though, shared care has to become mainstream.

### Catherine McNair

It's something that we just talk about. You know, Andrew's taking leave. You know, Mohammed's taking leave. Catherine's taking leave. It is just something that everybody does when there's a new addition to the family. So that parenting and flexibility literally go hand in hand, because those people are literally picking up the option that's going to work best for them.

### Lisa Annese

Catherine McNair's vision of mainstream shared care is what we should be working towards. But before we get there, society as a whole needs to overcome incredibly rigid gender stereotypes. Victor Sojo, a lecturer in leadership and a research fellow at the University of Melbourne explains why these gender norms are a problem for everybody.

### Victor Sojo

It is a problem for women, because if they continue to do a lot of their unpaid housework, particularly people who are working full time, and they end up having to do two shifts. You know, one at work that is paid, and then another one at home. Well you could imagine, right, that people's cognitive, emotional and physical resources are limited. So you are always going to be overworked. So it is definitely a problem for women.

It is a problem for men too. Because if men want to participate more actively in caring roles both at home and at work, they continue to face all kinds of stigma because of the participation in those activities. And so again, that could be cognitively or emotionally taxing.

### Lisa Annese

And it doesn't stop there. Our children are also impacted by gender roles.

### Victor Sojo

We know that right now in Australia, this is not about start from 40 years ago. This is about nowadays. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to be also participating in care activities and unpaid work at home. And so we're basically raising the next generation of people in the same way that a lot of people were raised before. So it's going to be very hard to solve this problem when we're all behaving and perpetuating these stereotypes.

### Lisa Annese

And whether we like it or not, it's about social and emotional skills.

### Victor Sojo

It's about everybody in the family learning how to care for each other. As a core thing that we all need to learn. Unfortunately, a lot of what's happening at home is that we are focusing very much on making sure that girls actually learn how to do that. Which means that they grow up to do it better than boys do.

And the problem of that for boys and men in particular, is that we are left without a massive set of tools that we need to operate effectively in this world. So, as a man, when I think about this issue, I think it's very important that we also understand how it is about social and emotional skills as well. And what I would like to see in the future is parents and everybody in society actually putting more effort into helping boys and men develop those skills as well.

### Lisa Annese

Victor says it's crucial for more men like our storyteller Jacob, to take up shared care policies whenever they can.

### Victor Sojo

For men, it is crucial to participate more actively, more and more in family responsibilities. And so that's just one component of it. Another component of it is basically the kind of examples that we're setting for our children. The fact that children are seeing that both their parents are equally involved, that they care in a similar way about their well-being is very important.

### Lisa Annese

We should strive for a world where both men and women can care and work, free of stereotypes and expectations. To do this, Victor says we need to get the laws of the land behind business policies like those at QBE and Aurecon.

### Victor Sojo

There are many layers of this issue. So for instance, we know globally in countries where we have affordable and reliable day care centres, women are more likely to participate in the labour force. And so there is plenty of room for us to actually put country level policy about this. That could have a massive impact and a positive impact on the balancing of the care responsibilities. And also on the dynamics and perceptions that we have about what care provision is about. Okay? So that's definitely one component of it. So we need to actually have some kind of a strategic imagination about solving this issue.

### Lisa Annese

And finally, for any manager listening who wants to be part of this revolution and who wants to drive change, Victor has some advice.

### Victor Sojo

If you're a manager, what I would say is, you have no excuse not to be acting on this. So if it were 40 years ago, I could understand why you would be lost for resources or ideas of what to do. But nowadays plenty of research, plenty of tools from a number of agencies in Australia, telling you exactly what it is you need to do about this issue. And so step out of your comfort zone and start asking difficult questions about how to solve this issue.

And again, some of it is about your day to day practises on how you manage people who might be working flexibly. How you locate opportunities to employees. For instance, one of the key problems that managers have, is the one of how they distribute work across their teams. Which has a large impact on people's career's progression. If you're distributing work in your team based on who has children and who has care responsibilities, because you assume that they are not as committed, you are perpetuating a system where flexible workers, or workers with caring responsibilities, are not going to be able to progress their careers.

And so there is an element of self observation about how you're managing people on a day to day basis that could actually have a very positive impact on people's careers.

### Lisa Annese

For our storyteller Jacob, this positive impact has not just been on his career but also on his life at home.

### Jacob Lindsay

It's been great seeing from your partner's point of view. So for myself, I'm able to understand what it's like being the stay-at-home parent and for my wife, she's able to understand what it's like being the working parent. And obviously there's a lot of pros and cons with both sides. But ultimately at the end of the day it's been great for our relationship, because we've been able to communicate better and really understand what each other's situation is like.

### Lisa Annese

The Art of Inclusion is a podcast from the Diversity Council Australia. Andrea Maltman Rivera and Sam Loy are the producers and the executive producer is me, Lisa Annese.

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