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TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

Work with Purpose

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BE A CALD CHAMPION WITH JIM BETTS

TRANSCRIPT

David Pembroke:

Hello, everyone, and welcome once again to Work With Purpose, a podcast about the Australian Public Sector and how it serves the Australian people. My name is David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me.

As we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. I'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast is also joining us from.

Now two weeks ago, I had the absolute privilege and delight to speak with Dr. Suzanne Akila from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Jo Talbot from the Australian Public Service Commission, and Radi Kovacevic from the Department of Home Affairs, about the Australian public service's new cultural and linguistic diverse employment strategy that Jo and her team at the APSC have put together.

Now, as an over 60-year-old university-educated white guy who has enjoyed the privileges of a world designed for my success, listening to Suzanne and Radi's simple yet powerful stories of exclusion, of ignorance, of bias and discrimination left me, I have to say, embarrassed and a little uncomfortable. Now, I'd encourage you to go back and have a listen to that program before you dive into today's program because it really is a compelling conversation and it does set the scene.

Now, to be clear, neither Suzanne or Radi was complaining or whinging about their circumstances, they just told it as it was and as it is. And the overwhelming feeling that hung over the entire conversation was that we all must do better. And when I say everyone, I mean everyone. That's everyone at all levels and in all roles in public service in Australia. We must be more informed, we must be more aware, if we are to make the most of this incredibly valuable and diverse resource in the interests of our mission, which is to serve the Australian people.

So today, we're going to double down in a special conversation with the APS's cultural and linguistic diverse champion, Jim Betts, who is also the secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts. Now, Jim has served for over 35 years in governments across the UK, Victoria, New South Wales, and now here in Canberra. In his current role, Jim has overseen the department's delivery of a diverse range of new initiatives, including the regional investment framework, a new vehicle emissions standard, a review of the \$120 billion land transport infrastructure investment pipeline. There's been a considerable body of work done to strengthen online safety, and also, the delivery of the national cultural policy revive.

Jim Betts, welcome to Work With Purpose.

Jim Betts:

Thank you very much, David. Lovely to be with you.

David Pembroke:

Now, the main course of today's program will be a substantive look at the opportunity and challenges of supporting people, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the APS, including the cold compact. But for entree, we like to learn a little bit more about our APS leaders.

So, Jim Betts, what is the Jim Betts story? Where did it start?

Jim Betts:

Okay. I wasn't expecting that one. I've got a slight edge over you in that I won't be 60 for another two months. Otherwise, pretty much straight up and down the same story. I'm a pom, as you've described, came out to Australia having married an Australian in 1998. Worked in the Victorian government for 15 years, and then New South Wales. Worked in transport, worked in infrastructure, ran planning in New South Wales, my sins for a while, and then joined the Commonwealth just over two years ago.

David Pembroke:

So whereabouts in the UK were you born?

Jim Betts:

A place called Reading, which is near where the king lives. I'm trying to make it sound posher than it actually is. It's about 40 miles west of London, and that's where I grew up and that's where my parents still are, so I still go back every year.

David Pembroke:

And family and cousins and brothers and sisters, everyone's still there?

Jim Betts:

I've got a sister still there, and both my parents are alive and in good shape. Thank you for asking.

David Pembroke:

Okay. And indeed, education wise, what did you study when you're at school?

Jim Betts:

Both my parents were teachers, so there was a big focus on learning and academic success, probably to the expense of other life skills I could have done with, but went to the local state selective school, and then got a scholarship to Oxford University and studied modern history at Balliol College, Oxford. I was the year below Boris Johnson, we weren't close. And of course, a degree in modern history at Oxford University. Modern history starts in 871 AD, which is Alfred the Great, if you remember him and his work.

David Pembroke:

Oh, dad actually.

Jim Betts:

No, you wouldn't. And then of course the obvious natural flow is from being a modern history graduate at Oxford University into the civil service, which actually isn't as ridiculous as it sounds because a lot of the skills that you need to be a historian, looking at lots of different sources, lots of contested views, trying to discern a cohesive and coherent story and work out the underlying drivers of events and processes and policies are

common between being history undergraduate and being a public servant, trying to chart pathways for governments and advise ministers.

David Pembroke:

What was it like that experience of being an elite public schoolboy going into Oxford and Balliol College?

Jim Betts:

Well, the thing is I was from a state school, so I rocked up on day one, and there was a list in this... My college, Balliol, was founded in 1263 AD, and it's this sort of Victorian architecture right in the heart of Oxford, amazing place. And I arrived on a sort of late in the afternoon in October, and it's kind of dark, and I was looking at the list and everyone was from Eaton or Harrow, and it was me from scumbag college Reading. And so it was terrifying, but it was also-

David Pembroke:

Do you remember being terrified at the time?

Jim Betts:

Yeah, absolutely. Everything I've ever done in my life, which was exciting and an adventure, was also truly terrifying to me, and that's true of being promoted into ridiculous jobs like being a secretary of a department whose name is so long, you can barely get time to read it out. But yeah, so it was intimidating and scary, but you find your tribe and you find your little village of people. And it was an amazing experience. It was in the mid-1980s in England. That was the miners' strike that was Margaret Thatcher. That was a highly politically contentious and contested environment, but an amazing time to be a 20-year-old.

David Pembroke:

And how did that colour your experience there at Oxford, in a place which is very intimidating when you go there?

Jim Betts:

Yeah, well, I saw a lot of people who I liked but had come through a very different pathway. I'm not here to say that I'm from an underprivileged background, I'm not. I've said my parents were teachers, very middle class, had a lot of privilege. But I saw people who'd come out of the private school system, from those elite schools that I've just described, for whom the whole thing was just, this is a natural part of what life is, is you go to an elite private school and then you go to Oxford University and then you probably, I don't know, go and earn squillions of dollars in the city of London or whatever it might be.

And it struck me how, in a small way, how I felt I was out of place there. Or it was unusual for people like me to be in that environment because it was designed for other people. I felt like an intruder. And that was just a small feeling at the time, but when I play that back now and I think about some of the context that we're going to be talking about today, that's just a small inkling for me of what a lot of people feel their whole lives.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. So during your time there at Oxford, when did you feel that you weren't an intruder? Or did you always feel that you didn't belong there?

Jim Betts:

Well, the thing is, and again, we're getting into profoundly disturbing psychological territory, I actually kind of turned it into, the outsider thing into who I was. So whilst Boris Johnson would be walking across the quadrangle with his bow tie on, going off to the Bullingdon Club to do the unspeakable things they used to do there, I'd be in my Doc Martens with my punk rock hairstyle going off to see bands or whatever. And being an outsider and finding other people who felt similarly, like they were sort of bit countercultural, I drew strength from that and inspiration from that. And I guess as I've gone through my public service career, I felt less inhibited about expressing my own personality in the way I go about things, and less afraid about not playing by the rules of the game, less captured by other people's stereotypes and other people's rules about what a senior public servant has to be and how they have to look and how they have to behave.

And part of my shtick, if you like, is to destroy people's preconceptions about what a senior public servant looks like and how they act. Not in the sense of behaving inappropriately, all the stuff around integrity and political impartiality, absolutely a hundred percent. But do you have to wear a suit and a blue tie and all of that? And do you have to speak in mealy-mouthed management jargon the whole time? No, you don't. You can tell the truth. You can be yourself. You can make up your own rules and be authentic and still be pretty successful.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. So tell me, when that transition from modern history into the public service, at what point did you start to think that okay, maybe a career or a job in the public service was real to you? And it's interesting you talk about coming from a family of teachers, because lots of people have sat in that chair who are public servants and lots of people's parents have been teachers. So is it the influence of the family? Was it always there? Or was there perhaps a tutor or a lecturer at the university who said, "Hey, Jim, this might be something for you?"

Jim Betts:

No, I think it's kind of mother's milk type stuff in the sense that my parents were teachers. They were the first of their family to go to university. They're both obviously public sector workers, so there was never any question in my mind about the value of public service and the value of public servants and the role that government could play, by doing things all or by not doing things in making the world a better place.

I think, to the extent that my thinking has evolved over time, it was more coming out of Oxford, pretty brash, pretty convinced I was the smartest person in any room I walked into, 21-year-old, full of bullshit, really. And then, as I've gone through my career, learning from a whole heap of smart people, starting off at university, but also people that I've worked with and for in the public service. I kind of always thought that leadership was an overhead, something that sort of was the price you paid for becoming more senior. You get to be more influential in policy, which was what I was excited about. But you have to manage staff, which is a bit of a pain in the bum.

But I kind of crossed a point in my career, where I realised that it was actually leadership and setting the climatic conditions in which other people can thrive, that was the thing that I loved. And actually being the smartest person in the room was a complete furphy, and I probably wasn't quite as smart as I thought I was anyway. But that's where I got excited about leadership and the ability to make the world a better place by the way in which you enable people to fulfil their potential and to be safe and happy and feel respected and valued and get the best out of everybody in all their diversity, and that's a huge, probably my main motivator about why I'm still working, why I'm still a public servant.

David Pembroke:

And that's a nice lead in to the main course, which is really culturally linguistically diverse, the employment strategy, the compact. But in terms of then of being the champion for the APS, which I think, it's a fabulous job really, to be the person who has that responsibility, how indeed did that come about? Were you at sort of

secretary's board and Glenn says, "Okay, everyone, item number four, we need one of you to put your hand up to be the champion. Who is it?" And did you go, "Oh, well I'll pick that one up."?

Jim Betts:

That's exactly the way it happened. So I think there have been some networks which were already in place, like Ray Griggs, for instance, he's someone I love and respect a great deal. The outgoing secretary of the Department of Social Services had been Indigenous champion within the APS. But we were setting up new networks, one for disability and one for cultural and linguistic diversity. And Glenn did put out the call, who's interested in doing this? And Ray was keen to move from Indigenous where he'd done great work over to disability, and Catherine Jones put up a hand to do Indigenous. And I said, "I'll do any one of those things. I'm really happy to support diversity and inclusion in whatever form it might take." And they say, "Well, what about cultural and linguistic diversity?", something I'm passionate about, but my question was...

As we discussed, I'm the most white person you've ever met. Go back four generations and they're all English. I don't even have Welsh or Scottish or Irish. I'm so white. So I kind of said, "It depends what they want from a champion, because if you want somebody who comes from that community and has the lived experience, then I'm not your person." The message came back, no, they want somebody who's a secretary who's got the power that goes with being at the top table in government and knew they have confidence and will articulate the priorities and concerns and ambitions and hopes and dreams of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. And so I felt that was a great honour and it wasn't something I would ever contemplate saying no to. It was a great opportunity.

But then the next question is, what does being a champion involve? Not to do your job for you.

David Pembroke:

Way we go, right here, there we go. What does the role entail?

Jim Betts:

Okay. Well, good question, because it's there to be shaped.

David Pembroke:

Well, that's it.

Jim Betts:

So my view was that, when you are in a job like you're secretary, you're given an enormous amount of power. Sure, you work for ministers and they're democratically elected and they call the shots, but there's a lot of stuff that you do as a secretary where you can set the tone for things. You run departments. You take big decisions. You have access to the top tables and the rooms where all the big decisions get taken. And so, I guess I've always felt, I felt in recent times particularly, because I've had a background where I've left secretary jobs, that you're not in these jobs forever. You've got a temporary lease on power. And the question is, what do you do with that power whilst it's in your hands? Do you just try and prolong your own tenure, or do you want to leave a legacy, which is a bit more sort of meaningful than that?

So I guess I want to make the champions role, and I want to be an advocate at the most senior tables in government for culturally linguistically diverse people, so that they have a confident voice. They are able to see their aspirations reflected. So advocacy at the most senior levels, encouraging other secretaries to step up and take seriously the cause of attempting to achieve equality for culturally and linguistically diverse people within their own organisations. It's not my job to run other people's departments, but hierarchy and all of that kind of stuff is part and parcel of the Australian public service, whether we like it or not. And if the secretary

says something's really important, then everybody else starts thinking it's important. So I want to be a champion among my colleagues, as secretaries, to say, "This is something where we're not doing nearly as well as we should be."

You look at the intake in terms of new starters in our departments, and we have a very rich reflection of the multicultural society, which we're so proud of. If you look at the senior echelons of those same departments, you very rarely see a face that isn't white. So I want secretaries to care about it, so I'm a champion in that sense.

I also have a network of champions in each department, reasonably senior people who are embedded in each department, who are battling day in day out to get access to the senior decision makers in their own department, and themselves want to advocate for the staff networks for cultural and linguistic diversity. We've got fantastic volunteer grassroots networks in all our agencies and departments, or most of our agencies and departments, and they are sources of great advice. They're advocates and they're sources of mutual support to their members. But they can't create a really great and inclusive workplace on their own without support from senior management. And the champions have a role to play, but those champions themselves need to have backing. So I guess it's just trying to build from the lived experience of people who might otherwise be marginalised and excluded, and use the hierarchical power structures of the APS to make their ambitions the ambitions of the secretaries and the leadership of the public sector.

David Pembroke:

So what are, say, some of the preliminary ideas that you've had to challenge some of the stereotypes to remove some of the barriers? So is that there is probably an easier path through to leadership, which is really where a larger challenge is, as you say? The numbers at the entry levels are fine, but we're really struggling at that leadership level.

Jim Betts:

Yeah. Well, the first thing I want to say is that I've sort of swung into this as the recently appointed champion, as of May or something, but the whole heap of people including Subho Banerjee and his team at the APSC, some of whom you talked to, have been doing great work on this for a long time. And I want to make it clear that I'm not just coming in and claiming credit for their work by any stretch. But I think it's a mixture of top-down, bottom-up.

So at the most recent secretaries board meeting, the secretaries board endorsed a statement of purpose, which starts off with a statement of our legislative obligations to have an inclusive workplace, but then includes some pretty powerful statements of commitment about what equity and fairness means for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in our organisations, in our overarching organisation, which is the APS. So that statement of intent was one of the first actions arising from the strategy and the action plan, which the APSC produced and which the secretaries board endorsed back in April.

David Pembroke:

So is that the cold compact?

Jim Betts:

Yes.

David Pembroke:

That's what it's been named, okay.

Jim Betts:

Yeah, and you'll see, some of the language in that... One aspect of our culture in the APS is we tend to think that every problem can be solved by legislation or by structure or by process, and it acknowledges the legislation. But the guts of it for me is the authentic emotional and moral commitment of the leadership of the public service to say this really matters and we need to do better. So that's the kind of top-down component, and then there's a bunch of stuff that flows from that that we can talk about.

But really, the engine room of this is the lived experience, the stories that are told by people who don't have power, whose voice is articulated individually, but most powerfully through their networks where they come together, and they tell the stories about what it's like to be somebody from a Southeast Asian background that walks into a room where you are the only person who looks that way, or where you look at the leadership team of your department and you see nobody with a black or brown face.

One of my, a little diversion if you don't mind, one of my privileges in my job is I'm responsible for the arts, and I've just come from an event this morning at the National Gallery of Australia where Lindy Lee, arguably Australia's greatest living artist, was with the governor-general and the arts minister unveiling Ouroboros, which is her great new sculpture.

David Pembroke:

Wow, okay.

Jim Betts:

And she talked about the meaning of that sculpture, and she was standing next to Auntie Jude who's a Ngunnawal elder, about growing up, having been born in 1950s in Australia, white Australia policy in full swing, and what it felt like to be effectively told every day you showed up that, "This place is not for you, you are not included in this, it wasn't designed for you," and the way in which you cope with that and the way in which you internalise that and the way you think about what that means for the respect or disrespect that's shown to your parents and your elders. And that's a really powerful thing. And I think one of the reasons why it's proven so intractable to shift numbers, maybe for people with disability and for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, over the last few years, why it's been difficult to change their pathways to power, is that those who are already in power are clueless as to what the barriers are that are strewn in the way of these people.

We are unconscious of our own biases. We don't walk in the shoes of people, to the extent that we should and understand the ambition. We talk about imposter syndrome and the way we feel inadequate in our senior roles. Imagine how that's amplified by not being able to recognise anybody that looks or talks like you in the senior leadership. And yet, the business case of addressing this is compelling, if you want to use the language of business cases. You talked very well at the beginning around we need a public service which reflects the diversity of the community we serve. But think of the wasted talent. If you've got 34% of your intake are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, but that gets narrowed and winnowed out as you get to the senior echelons, all the talent we are leaving out or excluding from our own. And that's before you get to moral questions about how important it is that every Australian should be given every opportunity and no one should be left behind.

So, sorry, this is turning into a speech, but I guess it's top down, it's bottom up, but it's about leadership. It's about the way we do things around here, and you can't fix that with legislation. It's got to be leaders talking with authenticity and passion, saying this is really important, and we will hold ourselves to account for making a difference on our watch, not just in 20 or 30 years time when all of us are dead anyway. But whilst we are in these positions of power for however long that is, we are in a hurry to make a difference. And the way we will do that is by putting aside all the trappings of power and all the ego and listening to the voices of the people

who are on the receiving end of this discrimination and asking them, what do we need to change to give you every chance of success?

David Pembroke:

But it is, and I'm sure you'll agree, that you do need the architecture of the legislation and the frameworks and the compacts and those other bits, but it's filling in the gaps, isn't it, across all those different areas, from the bottom all the way through to the top? And it's as simple as even encouraging conversations, to understand, to sit down and say, so tell me your story. Where are you from? And I know, here, at the company I run, we have these cultural catch-ups, and it's amazing when you hear these stories of where people and their families have come from and the richness that they bring to their work. And when you engage in that and you open it up, you get double output from person, because all of a sudden, as you said to that point before about safety, well, outcome's the next layer, which is even more powerful people when they feel like, oh, okay, I'm part of this.

Jim Betts:

Yes. And I just think my basic philosophy on leadership is, you get the best out of people when they feel safe, they feel valued, they feel respected, they feel that they belong, and you don't if they feel afraid or if they feel excluded. Now that's a series of motherhoods in one way, but the way in which you turn that into something more than motherhood statement is by, first of all, enabling those stories to be told, so that the issues are raised and the different perspectives are given respect and are amplified through the organisation.

But we also need to make sure that we are giving people of goodwill, and there are many, most of us bring goodwill to this. We're proud to live in a multicultural society. We're proud of the waves of migrants who've achieved incredible things to be part of our society, that we give people the tools to work with so that they can be good managers and good leaders and understand their own biases, understand what they can do to acknowledge the diversity of their own workforce and get the best out of people by acknowledging and respecting that. And we often, particularly people in the middle echelons at the public service, what are called the EL-1's or the EL-2's or even the IV-6's, to use our hierarchical terminology. They own the culture. They are where the key decisions get taken, and yet we ask them to step up and be culturally inclusive and culturally humble and all these things. We don't always give them the toolkit and the support and the coaching and the mentoring and the advice.

So within the package of measures that's in the strategy and the action plan is mosaic, we call it which is a resource to support everybody, but including managers on how to manage a culturally and linguistically diverse team. And to do that in a way where you get the best out of people. And often, people are, they bring good will, but they're so worried about making a mistake about some kind of transgression or sort of cultural faux pas, that they get a bit stuck on the starting grid. So part of it's about the voices of those who might otherwise be marginalised and excluded in the cold community. A part of it's about giving allies the support to be the best allies they can be and managers.

David Pembroke:

So it's a bit of a how to guide, is it, this mosaic?

Jim Betts:

Yeah, it is. And there's a kind of reinforcing loop there. You get the experience of what's worked and what hasn't worked from the authentic voices of the people on the receiving end in the cold community, and then that feeds through into how to guide for people at all levels within the organisation. So I don't want to glorify... Secretaries and their endorsement, that's necessary, but it's not sufficient. It's got to be tens of thousands of people in this movement to try and bring ourselves into alignment.

David Pembroke:

And it is everybody, isn't it? That was one of the things that really struck me in the conversation that I had a couple of weeks ago was that it's everyone. It's not, as you say, it's not just top-down. Oh, the secretaries have got it. Everyone's got to get it. And if everyone gets it, the benefits are substantial.

Jim Betts:

I agree with that. I mean, the culture of an organisation, the way we do things around here, the ground rules, the unwritten ground rules, everybody owns those. Everybody has equity in those and every interaction, every time you bump into someone in the lift, every time you say hello to someone in the corridor, you ignore them. The way you chair a meeting, all of those are moments of truth for the culture of the organisation. There may be somebody from a culturally and linguistically diverse background who hasn't spoken in a meeting, you don't know what's going on in their mind. They may have all kinds of views of the world that make it scary for them to speak up in front of somebody who's older than them or somebody who's more senior than them. We don't know, but everybody can play a role in trying to break that down.

But I'm also realistic enough to know that not everybody jumps on board with this stuff. When I look at some of the negative commentary, it's around this is a woke agenda or this is about privileging people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds over other people, and it's none of those things. That's just silly stuff. This is about according the same traditional values of politeness and respect and decency to everybody, regardless of their background. And it's not about privileging one group over another. It's about recognising that when we talk about things that are so sort of embedded in our vocabulary like merit in recruitment and so on, we are actually applying a whole bunch of assumptions and prejudices when we apply merit, because the people who have designed the merit principles have come from a very narrow echelon of society. And so challenging that and enabling all of us to challenge our own unconscious biases is a way for things to be fairer and more inclusive, and therefore, better for everybody because nobody benefits from not having the best people succeeding in our organisations.

Everyone can play a role, but I also know that there will be 10, 15, 20% of people who think it's all bullshit and it's all woke stuff. Fine, they can have their view. I'd like them to come on board, but I'm not going to be constrained, and I don't want people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to be deterred by the most negative voice in the room. If we did that in society generally, we'd never have achieved anything.

David Pembroke:

So when you took the job in May, or you put your hand up and clearly it's an area that you've been interested in prior to your time here as the secretary of the department, but we're now in October, or end of October, almost November, what surprised you or what's different? When you took the job, you probably thought X. What do you think differently about now, having been in the job for, what, six, seven months?

Jim Betts:

Well, first of all, going back to where we talked about in a complete different context, I was quite fearful coming into the role in the sense that so much good work had been done to get the action plan and the strategy up. But we have a bit of a cultural thing in the public service where we think the job is done when we've written a lovely document and I'm conscious-

David Pembroke:

Everyone could have a rest.

Jim Betts:

And part of being... Yeah, exactly. And it runs the risk of gathering dust. And so I kind of used that anxiety to drive myself to constantly say, well, what's happening next? How are we turning ideas into actions?

And I've been very pleased and impressed with the level of engagement I've had from the Champions Network. We've had three or four meetings there. I'm pushing at an open door with my fellow secretaries in terms of their willingness to come on board with this. Often, the HR functions in our organisations who are given quite a load to carry, under resourced or have been subjected to a whole series of efficiency dividends over time, so their bandwidth to do stuff which may be in the past has been regarded as discretionary is quite eroded. So I've been enthused by the amount of activism and passion within the APS, a little bit daunted by the prospect of how we would define success in a year or two's time.

David Pembroke:

Have you thought about that?

Jim Betts:

Yeah, I have. I think about that all the time. The whole way I run my life is to say, well, what difference will I have made in two years time? Will I be able to look people in the eye and say we shifted the dial on that?

David Pembroke:

So is it a two-year job that you've got? You've picked that-

Jim Betts:

Well, I've got a five-year contract, but there's an election. Well, and the people who come after us sort of carry the torch as well.

I think, two years, that's within our reasonably predictable lifetime. That's comfortably within a term of government in APS terms.

And I've talked to people like, a friend of mine, Kathrina Lo, who's the Public Service Commissioner in New South Wales, and she's from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. I went and had a coffee with her very early in the piece and said, "What worked and didn't work for you? Where do you feel proud that you've made inroads?" And she described to me some of the programs that the New South Wales government had got up around active sponsorship by senior people of the careers of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and the sort of coaching, mentoring, but sponsorship as in actively encouraging and seeking out opportunity for people, and how the New South Wales government on the back of that, and I've come from the New South Wales government, had managed to achieve a material shift in the number of senior executives from cold backgrounds.

When I look at what we've done on gender, there's some work still to do on gender pay equity. Some organisations have boards where there isn't good gender balance, but in my organisation, 52% of our senior executives are female. That's pretty common now across the public service. That wouldn't have been the case 20 years ago. It might not have even been the case five or 10 years ago. So you can change these things.

In my department, our First Nations senior executives representation has gone from zero to five, and that's basically because we decided it was important. So with concerted effort, with empowering managers, with leaders saying this really counts, I think two years is the maximum timeframe in a way for the check-in. But what we're going to do as a secretaries board is, every six months, the APSC is going to give us the dashboard of how we're travelling at different levels of seniority in the public service in terms of cold representation. And if we don't see movement on that in the first 6, 12, 18 months, then we're going to need to ramp up the intervention to make sure that we get movement at the station.

David Pembroke:

It's interesting. That idea that you just mentioned there from New South Wales, this idea of sponsorship, of mentorship, of someone just saying, "Okay, I'm going to do that now," now that's something people can do. If you are listening now, why don't you take that on? Why don't you actually go and do that? Go to work tomorrow. Find someone who's in your team, and I'm sure they'll be there, and just do it. Mentor that person. Take responsibility and see what comes with that, because I'm sure what will come with that will be good things for you, as well as for the person that you sponsor. You're going to learn something.

Jim Betts:

That's right. And that will be an even more powerful experience if we can provide the tools for people to understand what the role of a sponsor is, the kind of things you might do, what good sponsorship looks like based on the lived experience of people who've participated in it, either as sponsors or sponsees.

David Pembroke:

So the New South Wales government's got a template for something like that already.

Jim Betts:

Yeah, they have. They have. And we want to... That's why I was talking to Kathrina. We want to borrow it, we want to plagiarise it because we're all on the same side here. So, become involved. Everyone can become involved, but it's on us as champions, it's on the APSC, and Subho and myself and others and the leadership, to give people the pathways to be successful activists in this space.

David Pembroke:

Yeah. A final word then. That was almost quite a good summing up, but perhaps, give us one more note of encouragement perhaps, to people who are listening today, to get involved, because clearly, you're a man in a hurry. You're a man with a job. And you're a man that's got to get something done. What's your message to the wider APS about this?

Jim Betts:

That everybody stands to gain from having an APS, which draws on the phenomenal diversity and richness of the world's most successful multicultural society. We call ourselves that all the time, and we say it quickly and it sounds great, and we think there's loads of fantastic restaurants in downtown Canberra from different parts of the world, but what it really means is that the APS draws huge strength from the diversity of backgrounds, diversity of experiences, and it's a really exciting thing. And nobody loses from inclusivity and from giving everybody a fair go. What could be more Australian than that?

David Pembroke:

Very good. Okay, Jim. Well, I think we set a date for six months time, and we'll get you back in the studio and we will talk again about what are some of those bits, because as the architectures' in place, we're now going to start building out the floors, and what are the different bits and pieces, and let's keep talking.

Jim Betts:

Senior people need to be held to account, so absolutely coming back in six months time and accounting to you for what I've actually achieved in this role.

David Pembroke:

Okay.

Jim Betts:

No worries.

David Pembroke:

Good. Look forward to that. So a big thanks for Jim Betts to coming in today.

And really, this is a no brainer for everyone, really. I think that if we can just move towards it, open up our hearts and really think about the benefits, as Jim's just very clearly articulated there, it's going to be good for you. It's going to be good for them. But importantly, our job and our role in supporting the Australian people through working with the Australian Public Service, it's part of the job. It's part of the mission. So let's get after that as well. So big thanks for Jim coming in today to the studio.

Now listen, if you want to keep in touch with Work With Purpose, you can follow Content Group or IPAA ACT on LinkedIn, with the latest news about what's going on. And indeed, there are plenty of past episodes of Work With Purpose that you can go back and listen to on Spotify or Apple or wherever you get your podcasts. And while you are there, a rating or a review. We've had a couple more reviews this week and one of the reviews this week said, "Work With Purpose, a must listen if you are in the Australian Public Service," and I totally agree with that. So if you could give us a review, it does help the program to be found.

Now, we still have tickets available for our Men's Mental Health Live podcast on the 20th of November. We'll be talking to Matthew Short from the Department of Health, Matthew Breen from Running for Resilience, and Lachlan Vivian-Taylor about men's mental health. We invite you to actively shape the conversation with us on that evening, and I am so looking forward to joining you there at a live podcast. So go and register at the IPAA ACT website.

A big thanks again for Jim Betts for coming in. Work With Purpose is produced as a collaboration between Content Group and the Institute of Public Administration of Australia ACT, and supported as always by our very good friends at the Australian Public Service Commission. We'll be back soon with another episode of Work With Purpose. My name is David Pembroke, and it's bye for now.

Voice over:

Work with Purpose is a production of Content Group, in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration Australia, and with the support of the Australian Public Service Commission.