# **0:00 Carers Queensland announcement:** If you or someone in your family is using the NDIS, you’ve probably already heard of the myplace portal. Time to level up and make myplace work for you. Carers Queensland’s myplace portal support sessions can help you find your way around and get confident accessing your plan information online. Charge up your phone, tablet or laptop and bring it along to a free session near you. Find out more, check for events coming up near you and book your spot online at carersqld.com.au. You can also call us on 1300 999 636.

# **0:36 Voiceover:** Choice and Control, a podcast celebrating people with disability, brought to you by Carers Queensland, NDIS Local Area Coordination Partner in the Community.

# Andi Snelling is an Australian performer, writer and theatre maker with a career that’s taken her all over the world. This year she’s the only interstate act coming to Queensland for the Undercover Artist Festival, so we caught up with her for a chat about her solo show Happy Go Wrong.

**1:07 Andi Snelling:** I often refer to it as a soul show, for me, because it's a deeply personal autobiographical show. It's a theatre show for those who don’t know, and in particular my jam is physical theatre, so combining my upbringing of dance, but with acting, storytelling, goofing around, clowning, and a bit of roller-skating throw into the mix. But the story behind Happy Go Wrong is that in 2014 I was bitten by a tick while hiking overseas, and the long and short of it is that that resulted in my life completely being turned upside down. I developed severe illness, and I am still five and six years later navigating that chronic illness experience. And so the show is born out of a necessity, I suppose, that I was feeling at the time when I created it, to express through my art forms what this completely life altering experience has been of complete change in body functioning, in sickness, and in very much going to the brink and coming back. And the incredible empowering lessons as well that I have learnt through that experience, and the deep appreciation I now have for simply being alive. So Happy Go Wrong is very much a show about finding the happy in the wrong, and that through doing that is where I’ve been able to not only survive, and I don’t say that lightly, I very much went through some very dark and difficult times, but also I’ve actually come out the other side thriving. So that’s what the show encapsulates, so that’s why I say it's a soul show, because it very much comes from a very deep experience in my life I suppose.

# **3:13 Jodie van de Wetering:** For such a serious subject matter though it does sound like there's quite a fun fantasy element to the show though?

**3:21 Andi:** Yes, that’s very true. So I am by nature a very playful person, and so it was important for me that this show that looks at themes of sickness, disability, mortality, and resilience and struggle, it was important that I found joy in all of that, as well as not shying away from presenting on stage some of the darker aspects of that. But my own lived experience of all of that has been that there's been this wild double experience of, it's been really heavy and dark at times, but I’ve also been happy and found a lot of joy in amongst all of that too. I mean I never thought it was possible to live in varying degrees of pain pretty much constantly and still find ways of being happy. My former self never knew that that was possible, you know. And so I think yeah what I do love about my show Happy Go Wrong is the playful aspects to it.

The show is essentially a rescue mission, so there is a character who is a French angel who flies down to earth on roller skates, and this character is obviously played by me because it is a solo show. So I play my own French guardian angel called Lucky who’s this beautiful philosophising bumbling French angel with a dodgy French accent, who is there to basically rescue Andi from her misery. And so this character is very cheeky and plays with the audience a lot and is sort of like the Greek chorus and narrator at the same time if you will, and is the character I think that drives the show initially, and is an important device that I use as an artist to be able to distance myself, Andi, from the very personal nature of the narrative that I am discussing, by playing another character that sort of looks on and comments like ‘oh look at Andi, look what's happened to her’. Yeah, it gives that healthy distance where I can bring in comedy as well you know to the whole thing.

I think a lot of the time when people think about people who get really sick with life threatening illnesses or have these life changing experiences after which they are, they then identify as disabled or whatever it all is, I think so often people are quick to go to the tragic element. But it's like I think it's really important to show as well that there's actually some extraordinary comedy and play and fun that can be found in all of that experience. And I know that might sound a bit challenging for some people to hear because that’s not to dismiss the difficulty that a lot of people, particularly like myself who have invisible illnesses and disabilities experience, I’m not dismissing any of that, that is really valid and really difficult to navigate in this world. But at the same time I’m just really wanting to show that there's another whole side to it as well, and that there is joy and fun and play, and that we can kind of joke about ourselves and our experiences a bit as well. As a way of educating you know.

# **06:45 Jodie:** While there's a lot of fun going on and there's a lot of fantasy elements and there's roller skates and there's French angels, it's not just a light piece of entertainment though, there is actually something the audience can take away with them afterwards?

**6:58 Andi:**  Yeah absolutely. So I kind of describe it as a roller coaster show, and it is both physically, for me to do, and also emotionally, it's a beautiful journey that I take the audience on. So in parallel to this very fun buoyant French angel character, there is the secondary character which is Andi, which is effectively me playing myself, and this aspect through the use of physical movement and interacting with large nests of brown craft paper which are like these incredible sculptures on stage that I move through and with and I drown in them and I fight with it, and that represents all sorts of visual metaphors that people can read all sorts of things into. So yeah there’s definitely an aspect of the show that, yeah, is vulnerable and raw, it's just in my nature again as a performer to find that humanity, I suppose, that connects us all, audience and me.

No matter whether someone is disabled or not, no matter what experience they have in life, I’m interested in that humanity that connects us all. And so I do take myself to very vulnerable places in the show, and through that hopefully open up my audience to consider themselves and their own place in the world and their own sense of mortality. And with that there is an epic journey that does occur for sure, and I’ve had a lot of audiences overwhelmingly say to me that they definitely leave my show feeling very different to how they arrived, in a good way, they always say there's a lot to take away and reflect on, and people seem to be personally very impacted by it, which has been tremendous for me to witness.

# **9:01 Jodie:** It must be so rewarding to put something so personal out into the world and have it received well, and it makes people think?

**9:09 Andi:** Yeah that’s right, I mean I guess it's the ultimate dream as an artist of what we’re going for, you know, is to have an impact on the world. I don’t make any grand claims to be here to change the world, but I do think that every time I perform that show something does shift in that magical space that only can occur in the liveness of theatre, between myself and my audience. Yeah look, the show, it's done a couple of seasons already, and it's just had an incredible response. I mean I’ve never done a show like it before, it's had just across the board outstanding reviews, countless five star reviews, standing ovations, it's won five awards. But more importantly than all of that for me has been, I guess the level of community engagement that the show has enabled. And what I mean by that is just the amount of complete strangers that will stick around in the foyer afterwards to speak with me to share how the show’s affected them.

# **10:16 Carers Queensland announcement:** Getting started with your first National Disability Insurance Scheme plan? Get off to a strong start with Carers Queensland’s free workshop, Using Your NDIS Plan. Learn how to use your funding, work with service providers and use the myplace portal. Find out more, check for events coming up near you, and book your spot online at carersqld.com.au. You can also call us on 1300 999 636.

# **10:46 Jodie:** It sounds like a really physical show, it sounds like a solid hour of physical things going on - does that knock you around a bit, given your health?

**10:56 Andi:** Yes, that is a really great question because I kind of joke a lot about this sweet irony that my chosen genre of preference, in terms of performance styles, is the more physical the better, and yet it is my body functioning and my physicality that has been the most impacted by my illness experience over the years. So I sort of laugh with myself and think gosh why couldn’t you just be one of those artists who just likes to sit still and deliver a monologue? But I’m not like that, that’s just not my thing at all, I have to be, I love moving, I love expressing through moving the body. So yeah it's definitely been a learning curve for me to come back to the stage and learn how to work in physical ways with a body that’s now very different to how it used to be. So I was a performer beforehand anyway, I have been all my life, and when I fell ill with Lyme disease I would say there was about a good three or so years there where I wasn’t really performing at all, I wasn’t able, just wasn’t able to. And when I did slowly but surely start to re-emerge, which was in the form of creating Happy Go Wrong in fact, through that process I had to re-educate myself I suppose on how to be a performer and how to create the kind of work I still desire to create, but while looking after my body and keeping myself safe and all of that.

So self-care has been a big part of learning for me, and I know it's a very kind of trendy buzzword at the moment, but it is something I now have a different relationship to, and that I take really seriously. I mentor a lot of artists, and I often say to them even if they're fully able-bodied artists, I say you know everyone has access needs, and self-care is for everyone, and so think about when you're creating a work what your individual needs are and try to really honour those and address those because you’ll have a much better time making your art, and it’ll be way more sustainable. Art can be very boom and bust, like it's a common thing that’s spoken about with people with ME, chronic fatigue, which has sort of been a big component of my Lyme disease journey as well, is this boom-and-bust idea where you sort of push yourself, you're having a few great days and you think ‘wow I’ve got energy!’. And then you sort of push yourself and then boom you crash again. I have experienced that a lot over the years because that is in my personality to kind of push the limits a bit. And I always say we have, many of us have lots of different types of disabilities, and we are allowed to get it wrong. And there is no wrong in fact, you know, we are allowed to push our limits and to maybe do something that isn’t right for our body, or our doctors told us not to, you know we are allowed to do that and work it out for ourselves. So much of the time I think people with disability get this experience of being mollycoddled, wrapped in cotton wool, told you can’t do things and I think there still needs to be a level of autonomy and finding your own way through.

There were times when I’d be rehearsing this show and I just couldn’t actually run the entire show, so I’d rehearse in very different ways. I often say to people a lot of this show in the early days was rehearsed in the bath, like literally, I would just lie in the bath, be speaking the lines and like acting out the show, but just from lying in the bath, but visualising myself doing it. And so the cool thing about all of that is that I have discovered a whole new artistic process for myself, that is so different to how I used to work and has actually opened up more creative possibilities for me. So I’m a big advocate as well for things that we perceive as limitations or, you know, restrictions on our body or whatever, can actually be hidden trapdoors, secret doors into whole other ways of working, or functioning, that we just hadn’t considered before because we weren’t forced into the situation to consider another way. So yeah it's a great question. The show is highly physical, but I have a massive preparation routine before the show, and a whole recovery routine that I go through after the show, in order to be able to do the show.

# **15:28 Jodie:** Andi any plans yet for the future, maybe taking what you’ve learned about working with your body and applying it now to new work?

**15:35 Andi:** Yes absolutely. I’m the sort of person who constantly has 1000 ideas for 1000 different shows, performances and art works running through my head. So for me it's about really getting focussed on, focusing on one thing at a time, like what is achievable. Yeah I am already in the early development stages of what will be my 4th solo theatre work. I can’t yet fully reveal the details, but I will say I am researching that show, I’m in the research phase sorry for that show, and the early writing stage of that. And I am dealing with a whole lot of new elements in that show that I’ve never done before, which I’m very excited by, and one of those embedding access into the theatre work from the beginning. So for anyone for whom they don’t know what that means, what that means is essentially a concept called aesthetics of access in art, and it means rather than what I’ve previously done is create a show that I want to create and then add on the access elements afterwards - so that could be adding on an Auslan interpreter who stands on the stage with me to interpret the show in Auslan for the Deaf community, or that could mean adding in audio description to the show where an audio describer will sit up the back of the audience and describe the show for people who are blind or low vision. So that’s an example of creating a work and then adding on the access at the end, it's kind of an afterthought like yes it's lovely, yes it's important, of course, every show should have it, however, there's another whole level that we can bring a work to.

I’m being very ambitious in trying to achieve this, and I really hope I can, and I’m certainly trying to – and that is that with my new show I’m trying to incorporate for example like elements of Auslan and captioning and so forth into the actual show so that’s it like part of the narrative. Like there's a character who speaks in Auslan that’s just like a natural part of the show. They just happen to speak in Auslan like it's not a thing if you know what I mean. I’m consulting with for example a friend of mine who is a neurodiversity consultant, I’m speaking with him like what can I be considering with the making of my show that can help make it easier to navigate for someone with say autism, or differing sensory needs or whatever in my audience. So it's trying to bring together lots of different types of access into the work, and again it offers my work a different type of feel and creativity that it wouldn’t have had if I weren’t doing those things.

That is an exciting new thing for me that I’m trying to bring into my new solo show. It's a really big undertaking because it involves me educating myself around different forms of access. Because I know my own access really well, but we don’t always understand everyone else’s as well. But I’m very passionate about that. And then also you know trying to raise funding as well to be able to fund all of those components too. But I’m not perturbed by that, I’m just looking at ways of trying to make it happen at this point, and we’ll see what the final product is, I’ll do the best I can, but that’s like, that is one strong example of how my own disability experience and my own experience navigating my own access needs to make this show, has now grown into another whole level of how I think about creation for the next work for example.

# **19:18 Jodie:** Andi Snelling’s show Happy Go Wrong has one show coming up in Brisbane for the Undercover Artist Festival on September 17. Find out more at undercoverartistfest.com.

# Thanks for joining us at Choice and Control, a Carers Queensland podcast. For more information about the National Disability Insurance Scheme or Carers Queensland, contact us online at carersqld.com.au. You can call us on 1300 999 636 or head to Facebook and look for Carers Queensland NDIS.

**Mentioned in this episode**

* [The Undercover Artist Festival](https://undercoverartistfest.com/)
* [Andi Snelling’s website](http://www.andisnelling.com/)
* [Carers Queensland website](https://carersqld.com.au/)
* [Carers Queensland upcoming events and workshops](https://carersqld.com.au/events/)
* [Carers Queensland NDIS on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CarersQueenslandNDIS/)

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