

Janelle's Story



Janelle Scobie was interviewed by community worker Judith Larsson at a Town Camp in Alice Springs to mark the International Day for People with Disability. Judith Larsson transcribed this interview in consultation with Janelle.

Janelle Scobie lives at a Town Camp in Alice Springs. In November, temperatures reach more than 40 degrees, and concentrating in the hot windy weather can be a challenge. When Judith Larsson went to interview Janelle, she was welcomed warmly, and spent a few hours observing the life of this

remarkable woman.

On 3 December, the International Day for People with Disability will be celebrated, with a particular focus this year on disability and poverty. Janelle is an indigenous woman who has grown up with a disability, and she is sharing her story to raise awareness of those living with disabilities in difficult circumstances.



(Janelle is pictured here with one of her children and Bishop Peter Elliot)

Janelle is a strong woman, who enjoys painting and art, and, as described by her Grandfather, she's a very good mother to her three children. Janelle has been hearing impaired since birth, and communicates using sign language, by writing things down, by texting and by hand gestures. However, she is happy and peaceful.

"I'm happy with my community and family in Alice Springs. I'm like any other normal person."

"I was born deaf, I can hear a little bit and can talk only a little bit. I use sign language. I had six years of primary school in Alice Springs and five years of secondary school in Adelaide," she said.

Janelle is a wife, and mother of three children. None of her children have a hearing impairment, which can make communication a challenge, but not impossible.

"I use sign language with my children and with family in my Town Camp. It is difficult signing with my family and when shopping. Talking with my family can be difficult. Sometimes I do some signing together with them. I do lip reading. Other times we write things on paper and I also do texting with my family. But I have a happy family!"

"On the day for people with disability, I will be looking after my children at my home in Alice Springs. I'll stay at home and clean up and relax. Maybe my Mother will come to visit me and the kids. My Mum lives in Alice Springs."

Janelle's Mum is from Utopia but her country is Adelaide Bore, east of Ti Tree (north of Alice Springs). Her father is from Yuendumu but he lives in Kalgoorlie, WA, with another wife.

"I live in our family Town Camp in a house with my three children and husband. The camp is a one big family camp and it is a quiet place. Family is very important to me, living together and near other family, we help each other and share jobs. My family friend, Christine, and I organize for the young children to have play group. Maybe next year someone will come and help us with the playgroup for our children," said Janelle.

Janelle is helped by her mother and friend Christine. Her mother visits regularly from Alice Springs to help Janelle with the children.

Judith Larsson (Janelle's interpreter) works for Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation

which is a community-based organisation, working with Aboriginal families in remote Central Australia. Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi is Luritja language, meaning "doing good work with families". Judith describes the community in which Janelle lives, explaining something of the conditions.

"The Town Camp in Alice Springs where Janelle lives in is very small and comprises of one large extended family. It is set in a relatively picturesque area of Alice Springs, surrounded by some small hills and quite a number of trees that add to the friendly feeling of the Camp," she said.

"During our interview, the ladies kept asking Janelle to come and play as she is a good card player.....it was a bit hard for her to focus some of the time, plus her children wanting her attention."

All of this said, Janelle faces her disability with positivity and strength of character. She finds ways of communicating, and although there are challenges, she has hope for the future and is a happy person.

"Other people don't understand sometimes and think I'm hearing, but I say to them I'm deaf. Then I have to write things down. I can remember when my father took me to Adelaide for the first time to go to school with a lot of deaf people. We were talking (signing) having fun and lots of things. One day I'm going to Adelaide to visit old friends (deaf). However I'll miss my family if I stay a long time in Adelaide, so, I'm just visiting."

-Story by Beth Doherty – Communications Officer, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference