

Championing Change: A Conversation with Jade Farrar

Interview

Dheshini Naidoo



1 Jade Farrar

Meet Jade Farrar

Jade introduces himself; *"I'm a Pacific Island gentleman, born and raised in South Auckland, now living in the Auckland CBD"*. His passion for disability policy and creating meaningful change is evident from the outset.

"I've always had a real passion for disability policy and making positive change in people's lives," he shares. "That's why Enabling Good Lives (EGL) is such a big part of my work right now."

As the **National Chair of Enabling Good Lives**, Jade is deeply involved in shaping policy and practice that centres on self-determination, mana-enhancing approaches, and community building. His work is grounded in the belief that disabled people, and their families are the true experts in their own lives.

A Multifaceted Leader

Jade's professional portfolio is both diverse and impactful. In addition to his role on the **Enable New Zealand Board** and the **EGL Leadership Group**, he is the founder of **Ethics Studio**, a content creation platform. He also serves on the boards of the **Community Living Trust** in Hamilton and serves as a Trustee at the **Spectrum Foundation**, which he describes as *"the philanthropic and impact arm"*. Jade is also a board member of Spectrum care, which he explains is *"our services and residential supporter"*

"The common thread through all my roles is the desire to make a positive impact on the lives of disabled people and their families. That's what drives me."

Guided by Kaupapa

Jade's work and the way he lives his life is deeply rooted in the principles of **Enabling Good Lives**, particularly the belief in self-determination and the importance of community.

"In New Zealand, the systems we've created to provide support can be complex, sometimes overly so. Often, disabled people and their families are far down the decision-making chain. My focus is on bringing them closer to the decisions that matter most to them."

He passionately advocates for the principle of **"Nothing about us without us,"** emphasizing the need for inclusive, accessible communication and genuine engagement.

Listening First, Partnering Always

Jade encourages assessors to take the time to truly listen.

"Disabled people and their families value being heard. Even if you arrive at the same decision, the experience of being listened to just for 15 minutes longer, can make all the difference."

He also highlights the importance of **collaborative advocacy**, especially when it comes to requesting and submitting a request for the funding of non-list equipment.

"In almost every situation in my life, I've ended up with non-list equipment. That's where assessors can really make a difference, by advocating alongside the family. It's about working together so that the family understands the questions assessors need to answer, and assessors feel confident in the advice and decisions they provide."

Cultural Responsiveness and Equity

Jade emphasizes the importance of understanding the **cultural and familial context**, particularly when working with Māori and Pacific communities.

"For many Māori and Pacific families, the concept of family is multi-generational. Aunties, uncles, grandparents; they're all part of the care network. Equipment doesn't just meet a clinical need; it can restore roles within the family. It allows mum to be mum again, not just a carer."

He shares a personal example of receiving a Batec bike to help with mobility and reduce fatigue:

"It's not just about getting around; it helps me keep up with my family on walks. That's what independence looks like for me."

The Power of Co-Design and Collaboration

Jade reflects on the origins of Enabling Good Lives as a **disabled person and family-led movement**, not a government initiative.

"From the early days in Christchurch to the advocacy in Waikato and Taranaki, the voice of the community has been central. The national and regional leadership groups operate

on consensus, ensuring that no single voice dominates. That's a key feature of EGL and a big reason I've stayed engaged."

He also highlights how regional groups have worked with councils to ensure accessibility is built into infrastructure from the start, saving costs and improving outcomes.

Staying Flexible in a Changing World

As needs and preferences evolve, Jade encourages providers to move beyond rigid models.

*"One of the risks providers face, is relying on a predetermined 'menu of options.' We need to think about **visioning**, helping families imagine what a good life could look like, especially those new to disability. Becoming a **trusted ally** means providing information and support that goes beyond the immediate need."*

Communication, Technology & the Role of Social Media

As a content creator and founder of **Ethics Studio**, Jade is passionate about the power of storytelling and digital platforms.

"Social media should be a platform where disabled people and their families lead the conversation. Too often, it's providers talking about the work they do. We need to shift that narrative and amplify the voices of those with lived experience."

AI in the Disability Sector: Promise and Caution

Jade offers a balanced view on artificial intelligence (AI):

"AI is great for distilling information and helping us make decisions faster. But it can't create new knowledge, it only reflects what we've already given it. The real understanding of quality support comes from people, from communities, from professionals like yourselves."

Jade adds that AI can't replace the human connection:

"Spending time with a person, understanding their family, their needs, their aspirations, that's irreplaceable."

Tech Tools & Travel

When asked about a tech tool he can't live without, Jade shares:

"I now use an AI note taker in my meetings. It's a great example of reasonable accommodation; it allows me to focus on the content rather than worry about taking notes. It's become a key part of how I go about my day."

On travel, Jade reflects on the balance between digital convenience and in-person connection:

"Zoom and Google Meet are great, but they can't replace the connection you get from being in the same room. I recently drove to Taranaki, a 10-hour round trip, and while some might say that's inefficient, the opportunity to truly engage face-to-face makes a real difference."

Representation Matters

As we wrapped up, Jade offered a powerful reflection on representation in leadership roles e.g. on boards, in governance, etc.

"I'm told that having a disabled person on the board of a large organisation like Enable is still rare. I'd like to see that change. We need to support more disabled people to develop the skills to be effective board members and leaders. It's time to stop putting up walls."

Final Reflections

Jade's insights are a powerful reminder of the importance of listening, collaboration, cultural understanding, and adaptability in our work as health professionals. His message is clear: when we centre the voices of disabled people and their whānau, we create services that are not only more effective but more human. The Enabling Good Lives approach underpins Jade's philosophies and his broader focus, *"how can we get disabled people and their families closer to the decisions that matter to them?"*

"Ultimately, it's about creating change in people's lives. That's the big idea."