Ellen Spannagel

Hello, my name is Ellen Spannagel. And this is Enabling Commons. Today we are both very lucky to have Fionn and Jonathan Angus as our guests. Fionn and Jonathan are a son and father Dynamic Duo and the faces behind Fionnathan productions. They have a lot of public speaking experience, particularly about nature and climate justice. They also like to do stand up comedy, and both play traditional Irish music. Fionn and Jonathan, thank you so much for being here with me today. I would just like for you to tell me a little bit about yourselves. Who are you? What do you do?

Fionn Angus

Okay. Well, I'm Fionn,

Jonathan Angus

and I am Jonathan.

And together we are Fionnathan.

And thank you for having us. Ellen, we're really thrilled to be with you today. Yeah. And maybe we start by saying what is Fionnathan?

Fionn Angus

Yes, so. Well, so how Fionnathan came about, well it went - Well, we were talking about various options for a social enterprise name. Right?

Jonathan Angus

Yeah. Because we didn't think that when you were leaving high school,

Fionn Angus

yeah

Jonathan Angus

That you would fit well, in the kind of programs that we were told that people with Down syndrome are supposed to go into? Yes. And you wanted to do other things, you were, your ideas about what your future would have was much more ambitious than the kind of offers that were on the table

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

So, what did we tell the Department of Health Officer here in Ireland that you wanted to do instead?

Fionn Angus

So I didn't want to, to, sign my life away to, to a service to a local service provider here in Ireland, and I said to the to the officer that I wanted to direct my, my own, my own direct funding support.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, and at that time in Ireland, there was no one yet, apart from people with physical disability or sensory disability, who had been given a personal budget to hire their own support people. And so not surprisingly, their officers said, Nope, that's not an option. And I think this is one of the first things first lessons that we learned about advocacy.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

Well, how would you describe our response?

Fionn Angus

And, and so when he said no, all we had to ask him was, well, why not?

Jonathan Angus

Yeah. And, and, and repeatedly, you know, cause, because then he said, Well, that's, that's just not done yet. And we said, Now, I was researching a PhD in how family members can support young adults with with intellectual disability to achieve their dreams. So I've done my homework. And I said, I understand that you don't have a program like this yet. I also understand from your own documents that you recognize that this is a human right, that you're not yet providing and that your, your bosses are a little embarrassed that they're not doing it yet, and we are giving you an opportunity to do the right thing will make you look good.

Fionn had already told me that he would hire me as his assistant.

Fionn Angus

I did, yeah, and so I did,

Jonathan Angus

right, because it took us a year to negotiate it and work all the details out. But eventually they did give you the first they called it a pilot project, the first personal budget for your own supports, and one of the conditions was that we would have to start a company together. And so that's where Fionnathan Productions came from. Yes, we are effectively a service provider for one person. But we do so much more than that. Oh, yeah. Because we not only am I employed by the company but you are employed by the company, were really good at finding government funding and things and creatively working things out. So we realized that once we had a company, we could employ a Fionn using a government program through which half the money for your wages is, is kicked back to the company. But we were able, when we realized, well, we're a company we can employ you so we can talk this through and figure out what is your perfect job.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And so together we created for you a pretty awesome job, but we may we may talk more about the details of that as we go on.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Ellen Spannagel

Yeah, that's a super helpful explanation of how Fionnathan got started. I do want to hear more about what your dream job is like a little bit more about the different parts of Fionnathan that are special and make it what it is.

Fionn Angus

So we are a social entreprise that does work in the fields of arts, media, and education.

Jonathan Angus

Yes. And all of those came from, I think when you were a teenager, and yes, like dads everywhere do I was asking, Well, what do you want to be when you grow up?

Fionn Angus

Right!

Jonathan Angus

And you would give me a different answer every time I asked the question.

Fionn Angus

Yes, I would.

Jonathan Angus

Yes. So Fionn, for instance, plays the violin, plays traditional Irish music. And so sometimes you would say, I want to be a professional musician when I grew up. And I thought, Well, okay, maybe I can help you with that.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And but then when I asked you again, you might say, I really want to be a nature expert. I want to be a filmmaker. That makes films about wildlife all over the world.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And I said, Well, you know, maybe we can do some version of that.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

So we we decided that if we're going to create a job for you, we would involve performing music.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

making films.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

educating children. Sharing, sharing what we're learning by giving guest lectures at universities.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

traveling the world.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And, and doing art doing visual arts?

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

Showing, showing your artwork in different galleries and such. So. So we Fionn has a lot of pieces to your work. Maybe it could be summed up in about eight different categories. But they do come down to those three that you mentioned.

Fionn Angus

Yes,

Jonathan Angus

say them again,

Fionn Angus

the arts, education and media.

Ellen Spannagel

Okay, I want to hear a little bit more about the education. We'll just start with what do you what do you like to teach about?

Fionn Angus

Okay, so teaching children, I love children, actually. So for those, I teach them about, the the nature. Children love animals so, and teaching them how to love animals. And neighborhood, right.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, yeah.

Fionn Angus

And to cherish them.

Jonathan Angus

Exactly. Yeah. So our work with with children. We are sponsored through the heritage Council of Ireland.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

Fionn became Ireland's youngest heritage expert at the age of 17, when most of the people on the experts panel are, you know, graduates, graduate level scientists, natural scientists and such. But we approached the council and I said, My son is pretty amazing. We he has studied diligently, hundreds of hours, both in the books and out in the wild. And he knows his stuff. And he's got a lot to offer to young people about the world of animals.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And because of my background, I taught in Waldorf schools for about 25 years. And so I had a lot of experience teaching. And so we did this together.

Fionn Angus

Yes. And I've just mentioned that I'm a Waldorf graduate, so my dad was a Waldorf teacher in the system, and I'm a Waldorf graduate from the very same system.

Jonathan Angus

Yes. And one of the things we learned through that is to treat people in ways that are appropriate to their stage of development, and not to treat little children like many adults, so. So all so whereas we are very concerned about, about the problems of the environment, we don't bring this concern about the about the big scary issues to young children. Instead, we focus on what what to what's the message message that we bring to the younger children

Fionn Angus

to, to embrace the the love of animals.

Unknown Speaker

Yes, we think only if they have that foundation of loving the earth.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And the human relationship to the earth is all about the many ways that people help the world.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

When they're interested in the world, and we talk about farmers and we talk about, we talk about research

Fionn Angus

we do. Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And we talk about all the good that people can do toward and with the natural world.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And then when the children are older, well, then we talk about, what

Fionn Angus

about problematicizing this whole issue of invasive species of animals, plants, and

Jonathan Angus

all that the idea of invasive species is a good example. We wouldn't talk to small children with this idea, this kind of horrible idea of the species. But it is something that we're told as a reality, and one of the main problems. So I think then we talk about the tragic ways in which people are hurting the earth.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And, but of course, inviting conversation about ways that we could improve things.

Yes. both locally and globally.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

But first comes love.

Fionn Angus

Yes, right. Yeah.

Ellen Spannagel

Wow, I really love that, like just learning from a really young age to embrace the love of animals and nature, can you tell me about some of the different things that you teach kids about when you're acting to care for the environment?

Fionn Angus

Yeah, so we would make the thing called nature mandelas. So we would take children out into the woods that are close by the, the school and we will take them out, and we will have them like pick out colorful flowers or your pine cones, the kind of things that the woods provide. And, and the children would, would make the these big, wonderful, colourful circle of all kinds of forms, with ferns and pine cones and all of that. And children, we really do like that. They love it actually.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, our our goal is to teach the heart to awaken empathy, and interest, it can be to make us aware of what's here in our immediate environment, just by collecting up things, little treasures that we find in the woods. Yes. And, and that can that can be profound. There's so many lessons in that, but maybe one is about appreciating our assets as a community, our natural assets, and our social assets. And that's a big part of when we when we think of the intersectionality with with disability. To to, to see what we have. So what's one of our favorite words, for the work we do? We even trademarked it, beyond Fiannathan, then we sometimes think, well, maybe we'll we'll, we'll trade or we'll do some projects with this name.

Fionn Angus

Abundance.

Jonathan Angus

Yes. So we really we want to remind people or to help people to recognize that the world is abundant, and that our worlds are abundant. And maybe at the moment in terms of being locked down during the pandemic, it's easy to get depressed . And we are deeply concerned for the children, we think that they are one of the groups that are paying the most for this situation that the world is in. And that of course is a is is also true if you replace the concept of COVID-19 with the concept of climate crisis, and it's the children who are going to suffer the most from it. But at the same time to to not spend too much indulging in negativity, and to really, we love to flip the script and to say, look at what a wonderful time it is.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah. And again, with with disability, you know, to look at Gosh, I mean, as a as a, we sometimes use the idea of a family with disability, rather than an individual with disability or in as well as the individual, we are a family with disability. And it's, it's an amazing time, there's so many opportunities to make things better. So you could say, oh, there's so much injustice in terms of social, social inclusion and such. Or you could say, isn't it great that there's so many opportunities for us to make things better?

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Ellen Spannagel

Wow. Well, speaking to both of you is just a breath of fresh air, I think especially with all the despair people are feeling right now. And your message is really, really powerful to people and communities. We've talked about, you know, the education you've done with kids and some of the things you have taught, but can you tell me about University lecturing and your experience giving lectures to people from all over the world?

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, it started a few months into, once we knew that we would be getting the personal budget for Fionn. And we were already so convinced that this was the way forward in terms of disability support as a system, that there needed to be an option at least. And we knew that in other countries, but not all, there already was the opportunity for people to manage their own supports. But in Ireland, we were the first family doing it.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And so I reached out to, I think it was at the University of Limerick, first,

Fionn Angus

yeah,

Jonathan Angus

they said, Yes. So we put together a presentation, and we played some music. And like one of the core messages is if you're going to work in the disability support industry, you need to start thinking of the people are the person that you support as being your boss, the real reason you're there is because of this person. So give them the lion's share of your respect, and do their bidding, rather than the institution's bidding. But basically, we just tell the story of how you are in control of me, of your supporter.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And that my job is to is to help Fionn have a great life.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

In your own version.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And we, you know, we also recognize our privilege, the fact that I was able to set aside any other work so that even though your budget is rather meager, and yet only amounts to about 10 hours a week of pay for me, I said, That's okay, I'll volunteer the other 30 or 40 or 60 hours that we do every week together. But just as a model as an as an approach and the idea of, of employing Fionn through the company, to make your way in the world as a as a professional.

Fionn Angus

Yes. Right. Yeah.

Unknown Speaker

So we gave that one lecture.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

It went well.

Fionn Angus

It did. Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

By now, Tthis was This has been about six years. Yeah. We have given lectures in I think it's about 13, 14 of the colleges and universities around Ireland.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

But there's another nearly 20 colleges and universities in other countries that we've given talks in and an international conferences. So that's really, we love that.

Ellen Spannagel

Can you tell me about some of the research you have done about nature, in terms of data collection, that kind of thing?

Fionn Angus

Well, we are also members of the Burrenbeo landscape trust

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, and that's a really special organization. I mean, the Burren is a very special place. It's actually it's unique in the world as a karst region in Ireland, which is, of course, lots of exposed limestone, and it it doesn't have many plants. It's almost like a desert. And it is Ireland first and perhaps one of the first in the world, landscape charities, and they have the farmers who, who use this rough land to get to raise cattle and sheep and such. They work alongside the environmentalists. And together they figure out ways that the humans working on the land can be part of the solution. And so that's very exciting. So that's maybe one of our most interesting collaborations that we've done.

Ellen Spannagel

Yes, that is very, very interesting. Fionn, I have seen that you have a YouTube series, where you like to interview people and experts, and in particular, interviewing experts about climate change. So I'm wondering why you started doing that. And then I have a couple more questions about that.

Fionn Angus

Well for starters, I'm definitely passionate about the climate and the effect it has on the world of community.

Jonathan Angus

Mm hmm. Yeah. And where where were we in the world? It's kind of it was pretty amazing trip when you first came up with this idea of doing the climate change interviews.

Fionn Angus

Yes. We went to that amazing Amazon.

Jonathan Angus

We did.

Fionn Angus

Yes, we did.

Jonathan Angus

So we were we were in the world's largest forest. And we were very deep in the forest. We, our hosts live some distance up the Rio Negro about 30 hours, boat trip.

Fionn Angus

Yes

Jonathan Angus

from Manaus. And we were staying in a community of about 50 people who lived there. And every day we spent in canoes, because it was during the wet season. So the river was flooded. So you literally have hundreds of miles of water with the in the forest. And what were some of the animal species we saw there.

Oh, wow. We saw incredible animals there. One of them was really amazing, there was thistwo headed snake. Now, I did know, with amphibians, and with certain frogs that does that they do have eyes on their rear ends to frighten the enemy. but, the things is with this kind of snake, when it comes to head, it's been forked.

Jonathan Angus

This kind of snake is a species of snake that has

Fionn Angus

Yeah

Jonathan Angus

a real head at one end.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And, and, and can detail a lot like I had.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And we had never heard of it. And most books don't have it. And you search the internet for it. And it's very rare. In fact, our host who had moved to the Amazon about two decades before we met him, originally from Scotland said that for the first four years, the locals have been telling him about the species and he didn't believe them. And it wasn't until finally he saw one himself that he realized, yeah, it's true. Now we saw it in the two weeks that we were there. Yeah. It was an amazing place. And the people there were really amazing. And we realized they're living such a simple life there.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

So so just seeing how people can live such a simple life caused us to think if there's some real lessons here that we could all learn from. So why did you think that you would be a good person to collect the stories about climate from these people who live there?

Fionn Angus

Well, it's simple, simple answers to simple questions.

Jonathan Angus

Mm hmm.

Yeah. Fionn's very good at asking simple questions. Yeah. And we figured when it comes to climate change, part of the reason we believe that people don't do more Is because it's so complex, or it's made to seem so complex. And you've got the message is just so dense and so complicated, that it's easy to find lots of problems with it. Right? And we really just wanted to make it very simple. Yeah. And so do you only interview experts, like experts with college degrees, And and that sort of academic experts about climate change?

Fionn Angus

Well, yes, I do. Interview experts, experts but I also interview citizens.

Jonathan Angus

yeah, people who are expert by experience, like farmers and fishermen, and just people who are living their lives in in harmony with nature. Right. So yeah, a lot of the people that you interview are to ask, what what's going on with the climate? What have you experienced in your lifetime is really important to capture these stories of people's personal experience of how the climate has changed since they were children. That's, that's an example of one of the questions that you came up with.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

and there's only two questions. The second question is simply, do you have ideas for people? What can we do to to, to mitigate or to slow down climate change? Yeah, so very basic questions, but Fionn has been able to ask amazing people, all over the world.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

These questions, and so many interesting answers that have come from that. Yeah.

Ellen Spannagel

Yeah. So I can you tell me a couple of things that you have learned from interviewing these people. I know that, you know, like, you've interviewed so many people, and they all have very different experiences, but what are some of the things that you have taken away from it that are important to you just carrying forward?

Fionn Angus

Well I was interviewing someone and he mentioned some about the drought in Uganda.

Jonathan Angus

Okay.

Fionn Angus

So what can you imagine if that, if that chain? Well, it's aabout global woman isn't it. It's about it the earth accident actually drying out because of global warming and that kind of thing.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah. It's also a message about being aware of things that are happening that in different parts of the world that aren't affecting us directly, that we need to be aware of the changes that other communities are experiencing?

Fionn Angus

Yes. And global warming does have an impact. Definitely in both the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

Jonathan Angus

Yes. And when you interviewed the two climate activists from the Pacific Islands,

Fionn Angus

yes.

Jonathan Angus

They talked about the projections that their islands will be underwater.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And, and how we all need to take responsibility for that. So what's the kind of key message that you would say about that?

Fionn Angus

Um, to, to act locally, and to act locally, but start small?

Jonathan Angus

Okay. In what way act?

Fionn Angus

citizen research and citizen action.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah. Yeah. For us, you don't need to have a doctorate degree to take an interest in the climate and to do little things. And you can see big results if what you're focusing on is literally or figuratively your own backyard, you know, so it's so it's really important to work with local communities. And to to aim small initially, and and that can be very rewarding.

Fionn Angus

Yeah, yeah.

Ellen Spannagel

I like that act locally, but start small. Before I ask you a couple more questions about your work and disability and inclusion. Actually, I just wanted to ask if there were any other things you wanted to talk about, with the messages you'd like to share about nature, the educating you do the research you have done.

Jonathan Angus

Thank you.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

Well, we could make a little pitch about a project that we're going to be launching this summer.

Fionn Angus

Yeah. So big news! It's a podcast and video channel that we are calling Zoosophy.

Um, well, the direct translation from the Latin or Greek word of sophy is wisdom

, or love

Jonathan Angus

or the love of the thing. And zoo Of course,

Fionn Angus

is Latin for animal.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah. So So you could say the love of animals, you could say the wisdom of animals. It's, it's this project is about animals and people. And because I think there are environmentalists out there that would say, the world would be a better place if we just got rid of all the people. And we reject that notion. We think the world is a better place, because there are people here that that the relationship between the human and the animal

Fionn Angus

Yeah,

Jonathan Angus

if you look throughout time and around the world, and in so many ways, can be really amazing. And they're really, and they're the lives that humans live because of animals.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And I think it's fair to save the lives that animals live because humans are in their lives is, is is worth exploring.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And so that's the idea of zoosophy.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And we're, as you said, it's both a podcast.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And a video channel.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

Because we couldn't limit ourselves to one or the other. So this summer, we will be launching that.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

We haven't worked out the platforms and all of that. But you can surely find it by searching for us.

Fionn Angus

Yes. Fionnathan!

Because we're the only Fionnathan on the World Wide Web. So easy. It's easy to find. I think it'll be spelled in the notes for the for this episode. Is that right?

Ellen Spannagel

That's right. So zoosophy. I'm gonna keep my eye out for that. Because that sounds really cool. I love that the love of nature, love of animals, the wisdom of animals

A big problem within, you know, environmental justice and climate justice, is often people are working in their own categories in their own silos. And it's hard to create conversations between different groups of people. So I was just kind of interested to hear your thoughts about bringing those different people together and having those conversations.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, you could say when, when Fionn was born, and we learned that he had Down syndrome, it activated us. Right. As activists, I think that's sort of that that happens for a lot of families with down syndrome. So you become concerned first about? Well, why is this system or these many systems unfair toward my child? And but then you set you, it naturally follows on, why is system unfair toward all these other children and adults who have Down syndrome? And then by logical extension? Why are these systems unfair toward a number of other groups? Right? So you, you really, it's I think it is a natural progression to suddenly become aware of injustice in a broader way. And also, because one of your, one of the pieces of your job description is international travel to two amazing wildlife destinations, which of course, now we're reconsidering what with what with global matters and and carbon? Yeah, carbon footprint and all of this.

Fionn Angus

Yeah, that's a big factor.

Jonathan Angus

But we but we've taken an interest in people in other parts of the world. And we recognize that when we talk about the climate disaster and the human effect, we there's a there's a sort of a historical burden. That's, that's not equal amongst all people of the earth, that there are certain people who have a much greater responsibility for getting us to the situation than others. The responsibility shouldn't be borne equally, either. So if you ask, Well, what should people with disability do about climate change? What would you, how would you start it? an answer

Fionn Angus

the same way everybody else can

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, all people can do things?

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And your project interviewing about climate change is gives a lot of answers to the question of what can people do, but climate justice would suggest that people with disability don't have to do the heavy lifting here. We need to give more to the marginalized peoples of the world. In our, in our neighborhoods, and on the other side of the planet, and so really, I'm a bit uncomfortable about the idea of what can people with disabilities do to mitigate climate changing? Because really, you know, to make things fair to be just most of those people, if you will, or most of us who are find ourselves in the situation of being marginalized, should have more and and should have a better share. So, so the idea that we should all sacrifice, because of the situation we're in, isn't really looking at the historical and current in justices. We we have to do both. And so yeah, that's, it's really important that the that the right people sacrifice, I think that people with disabilities have a unique task. And you could say again, any marginalized people. When Fionn is included, so say like academically like yes, you're you haven't been to university yet.

Jonathan Angus

When fionn is included, so say like academically like yes, you're you haven't been to university yet.

Fionn Angus

Right.

Jonathan Angus

But you've, you've taught you've, you've worked for a lot of universities,

Fionn Angus

yes,

Jonathan Angus

as a guest lecturer.

Fionn Angus

Yes. And even though I didn't get like a leaving certificate, but I did get a leaving certificate applied program.

Jonathan Angus

So that's the Irish system of leaving secondary school.

Fionn Angus

Yes. Because I don't have like the same, marks like any other students would, I don't really have the marks to go on to like, college or the university or any other, like technological Institute of Ireland,really

Jonathan Angus

So the standard pathways to third level education are blocked, for you. And unfortunately, there isn't yet enough of non standard pathways in but that's one of the things that we're really fighting for.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

So what I wanted to say about you Fionn that when you have been included, yes, not only in educational settings, but but anywhere in in society.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

It's a great benefit to you to be included. But that's not the end of the story. It's also of great benefit, Fionn, when you show up for the rest of us.

Fionn Angus

Yeah,

Jonathan Angus

the people who, who don't risk being excluded the people who are kind of comfortable in Well, of course, I'm included. It makes us realize how much difference there is, and how much commonality of course, but it really makes us stretch. So I think people with disability, in terms of fighting for a better world are giving a great gift by honestly being themselves. And by just arriving and just speaking with their with their voice, whatever that might be, right? And so I think leadership is really important and Fionn, you are becoming a very competent, young leader. Yeah, and one of the things that I love about that is that it's not a disability leader, or it's not a leader in disability ness. But when you go to the classroom with the young children,

Fionn Angus

yes.

Jonathan Angus

Many of those children don't will in the future learn about Down syndrome or or about disability, but they don't yet know what that is. They just see a guest teacher. They see this guy who knows a lot about animals, a grown up who can teach them.

Fionn Angus

Yeah, well, what about this, like, when he went to a particular school, there's this one child who has Down syndrome, and he's like rest of them in that class, and, and then when I walk into the classroom and and all the children see me and and even the young guy with Down syndrome sees me. His friends, his classmates see me and they're like, Yes, they're fully grown teacher that looks like our friend! And and then and then often times I will talk about animals and then I will then jump in. Okay. Hello, there little guy nice to meet you. And, and some of them love that!

Jonathan Angus

some of his classmates clicks for them.

Fionn Angus

Yeah,

Jonathan Angus

and other ones that might come much later.

Fionn Angus

That's true.

And but I think it will I think they will remember Fionn. I think

Fionn Angus 8:53

yeah,

Jonathan Angus

I think for their life through one of the ways we all create stereotypes, you know that it's shorthand. It's the way that we get through the world. The stereotype that's being created when the children experience your teaching.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

is different than the, the sort of the old fashioned stereotype about people that look like they have Down syndrome.

Ellen Spannagel

Fionn can you tell me about the the music that you'd like to play, the traditional Irish music, the violin?

Fionn Angus

Okay, well, we're I play is on a major pedestrian street in Galway. And, and, and, and, and people react in a very , unique but a wonderful way when they see me there.

Jonathan Angus

They're oftentimes quite surprised.

Fionn Angus

Yeah, they often are

Jonathan Angus

most people just enjoy the music.

Fionn Angus

Yeah that's true

Jonathan Angus

And they might toss a coin into your case.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

But some people who kind of make the connection that here's a young fella with down syndrome you get who's playing traditional Irish music?

Fionn Angus

Yeah,

Jonathan Angus

it can be quite a surprise for people.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And we know that both because people do a double take when they're walking by

Fionn Angus

Oh, they do.

Jonathan Angus

But more often they'll they'll stop and have a conversation with you.

Fionn Angus

That's right yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And do you remember? Well, we only learned this after the fact there was a young couple. They didn't have their baby with them. But they were new parents of a child with Down syndrome. And they were both musicians. They did say, it's only sad that our little daughter will never be a musician. Like, like us, because while she has Down syndrome, they told us later that they rounded the corner.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And they saw you playing.

Fionn Angus

Yes, they did.

Jonathan Angus

And they said to one another, everything's gonna be alright.

Fionn Angus

Yep.

Jonathan Angus

And that, I think is a big way in which you do your advocacy.

Fionn Angus

Yes

Jonathan Angus

Just by being who you are. And by showing people what's possible.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Ellen Spannagel

Something I wanted to ask you both about is your love for comedy. When I was looking up your shows and stuff, you talk about everything, like from like movies to talking about injustices and like I love that, like creates a sense of community. But I just like, why did you start doing that? And like, tell me a little bit about your journey with comedy?

Fionn Angus

Yeah. How it actually started was Well, to begin with my father here. At first, he, Well, of course, you can speak for yourself.

Jonathan Angus

I know where you're going with this. Go ahead.

Fionn Angus

Yes. Well, he, he had fear starting out of just getting up on stage and telling jokes to people.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah. And then I thought, well, look at Fionn and all the things that he has attempted and achieved.

Fionn Angus

Yes. I love jokes And telling jokes. But sometimes, sometimes when I would like, so if I were to try to show a joke with friends or people. Well, my biggest fear is telling jokes with with people that that I don't know well. So this is my biggest fear in that. And but then you get the laughter out.

Jonathan Angus

But yeah, but then you you performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Fionn Angus

Yes. And I loved it and.

Jonathan Angus

the world's largest Arts Festival.

Fionn Angus

Yes. And we got people laughing that night actually.

Jonathan Angus

We did indeed.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And and there's comedy and there's comedy.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

So we want to do comedy that tells the truth.

Fionn Angus

Yeah about the injustices,

Jonathan Angus

about injustice. Yeah. And it was Bernard Shaw, who said, if you want to tell people the truth, you'd better make them laugh or they'll kill you.I think that we have used the opportunity to say some uncomfortable things can be usually the butt of the jokes. And I think that's really good that people see you as being the one who's who's in control of the of the partnership we call Fionnathan and there's reason behind that because you're the leader of this project.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And so the humor is often that way. And we did have a one strange experience at Edinburgh, where we were part of the routine was well, taking a bit of the steam away from john down dr. john down after whom Down syndrome is named, because we learned doing a bit of research that well, like a lot of other learned men at the time in the 19th century. He was a racist. And, and we are kind of questioning well, should we do we celebrate him when we call this condition Down syndrome and should we and we do a funny little routine about what if John Down had a different name?

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

Right. And which one do you think would have been the best?

Fionn Angus

Fantastic syndrome?

Fantastic. If it was named dr. john fantastic. That would have been, yeah, one example. So we did our show as we as we did each night. And at the end, a couple came up and said, yeah, we like your show. But we didn't like the part about john down. We're great grandchildren, or maybe his grandchild, but they were in john Down's family. And they said, you know, we understand that he was very nice man, the next evening and for the rest of the week.

I love this part

Jonathan Angus

you know, we told the audience that this had happened. And I said, well, that explains the icy stairs during the show. And then you said,

Fionn Angus

Icy stairs are difficult to climb.

Jonathan Angus

And that proved to be the best part of our show.

Ellen Spannagel

Yeah, you guys are so talented. And that takes so much courage. Hopefully, someday I'll be able to come see one of your comedy shows in person. Yeah, I did want to ask you Fionn a little bit more about what you would like to do in the future, what you would like to study some of the people you would like to work with someday some of your dreams in the next couple of months,

Fionn Angus

we'll just to give back to the environment and animals. I was actually inspired by Sir David Attenborough's Planet Earth because I'm so inspired by Sir David Attenborough and I just found one be like David, or as he was, and I just want to follow him in his footsteps basically.

Ellen Spannagel

Yeah, definitely. Definitely, he is a hero. So thanks for sharing what kind of inspired you to go in to go into that field and do that research. I have one more question. And then I'll ask, I'll ask you if you want to talk about anything else. But actually, my question is a question that you like to ask other people Fionn, and as part of some of the interviews you do, and I want to ask you, what do you love the most about your life?

Fionn Angus

Yeah. Well, well, I love, I love relationships. And I, I love to build community. And I also love the concept of interdependence.

Jonathan Angus

Wow. Yeah. So you should explain why. What is this interdependence that you love the concept of?

Fionn Angus

Yeah, well, really the tool is independence and the goal is interdependence.

Jonathan Angus

So often in the world of support for people with intellectual disability, the, the idea of independence is held up as like the ultimate goal. And we have problematized that and we don't buy it. We don't think that independence is all that great. Because what is independence?

Fionn Angus

independence is Robin crusoe.

Jonathan Angus

Yeah, Robinson Crusoe. It's being alone, right. It's being it's having no connection to anyone else, having no responsibility toward anyone else, having no reliance on anyone. It's you can do whatever you want to do every day. It's whimsical. It's it's untethered. So independence isn't all that great. On the other hand, you just said it's a good it's a useful tool, it's really important, to not be dependent and to know that you can get on, you know, that you can solve your own problems. But ultimately, when you have that knowledge, then what you want to work toward is freely chosen relationships.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

Right. Where you rely on other people,

Fionn Angus

yes.

Jonathan Angus

And where other people can rely on you?

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And you are bound to other people. And that's the opposite of freedom. But it's what really is fulfilling, right?

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Ellen Spannagel

Yeah, well, I just wanted to thank you for sharing for sharing your answer that question with me. I think, I think I've learned a lot in my conversation with with both of you today. I think the key word, and you've mentioned it several times, but abundance, and having abundance in your relationships with other people and your community, but also with the the natural world, the living world animals around you that we should learn more about and also take care of. I'm very grateful that you took so much time to sit down with me and talk about your stories. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about? final story, a message, a question that I didn't ask?

Fionn Angus

Well, thank you so much Ellen. You are a wonderful interviewer.

Jonathan Angus

Yes, I agree. And also your podcast brings together as you can tell, two of our big passions. Yeah. Climate change. Yeah. How to address it. Yep. And ability. Yes, right. Call it disability call it ability. It's one it's one realm.

You don't like I think I can say for you, you don't like being labeled as being disabled?

Fionn Angus

No.

Jonathan Angus

Right. And you got really upset about that a few times. And we we came to, of course, learning about the medical model and the social model of disability. The idea that, well, you don't wake up in the morning disabled. That's true, right? Where the disability comes into it when people disable you, when society disables you. So I think we do have to deal with the injustices that are there before we can just be just say, you know, let's just treat everybody like everybody else. I mean, ultimately, that again, that's like interdependence. That's the goal.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

But first, we have to, we have to make things right, we have to make things fair in a way that they they haven't been traditionally. So what we're learning as we go on,

Fionn Angus

yes we are

Jonathan Angus

It's all a big learning and I think, you know, Fiaon you have helped me to realize that I don't have to be correct. And I don't have to be afraid of people seeing me be incorrect, that that actually, I won't crush me to be to be recognized as being a fool about things. And so we try big things.

Fionn Angus

Yes.

Jonathan Angus

And we often fall on our faces, but then we can laugh about it.

Fionn Angus

Yeah.

Jonathan Angus

And then we, you know, fail better. Right.

Fionn Angus

So Ellen, thank you so much. It's been a real pleasure. Yes, you are a wonderful interviewer Ellen, I love your style of interviewing

Jonathan Angus

me too.