**Between our pages**

Episode 10 with Taryn Brumfitt

[0:00] Music.

[0:10] fiona: Welcome, you're listening to Between Our Pages, a Premier's Reading Challenge WA podcast.

This episode was recorded on Whadjuk Noongar land. We acknowledge the traditional custodians and pay respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

My name is Fiona Bartholomaeus and together we'll be diving into the wonderful world of books and reading right here in WA.

Today we're chatting with Taryn Brumfitt, 2023 Australian of the Year and author about her picture book, 'Embrace Your Body'.

Let's go!

[0:38] Music.

[0:45] fiona: 'Embrace Your Body' is a lovely picture book with important messages about positive body image to encourage young children to love who they are both inside and out.

It's a publication from filmmaker, author, advocate and 2023 Australian of the Year, Taryn Brumfitt.

Taryn, thanks so much for joining me.

Taryn: My pleasure.

Fiona: Firstly, what is it like to be named Australian of the Year?

Taryn: I don't even know if there's words that I can articulate to describe the feeling. I mean, I am just super grateful to have this platform to talk about what is a really important subject in our country, how we are all feeling about our bodies.

[1:22] fiona: How has this year been for you in total so far?

Taryn: Yeah, it's been challenging, absolutely, in some ways. But also we've been doing this work, you know, myself for 11 years now, and we've sort of been knocking really hard on some doors to open up this really important conversation.

Australian of the Year gives us the opportunity to sort of, for those doors to be opened quicker, people are listening, and you know, it's time to have a national conversation about our body image from the top down, from the ground up and everywhere in between.

Fiona: You've probably got one of the best platforms at the moment being able to have your Australian of the Year title and reach so many different people that you might not have before.

Taryn: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, our focus has been very much in the world, we've reached 200 million people globally, and so to put the focus, you know, here in Australia, our mission is to reach a million Aussie kids this year and to have from the top down the federal government support with our recent funding announcement to make sure that our resources are in all of the environments where kids live, learn, and play.

We are just so grateful to be able to amplify our message in that way.

Fiona: So tell us about your book, 'Embrace Your Body', and how it came about.

[2:42] Taryn: So the 'Embrace Your Body' kids book, it actually came about because I saw that there was a need to have songs for our little kids to sing and celebrate their bodies, and Pevan and Sarah are a children's entertainment group, they're teachers themselves, and they just do such a wonderful job of being able to educate and inspire our kids to do all the things we want them to do.

And we collaborated, I put some lyrics down, they turned it into a song, it knocked off Baby Shark off the number one spot on iTunes, just for like a minute or two. But it was pretty exciting for us just to think that it was really enjoyed by many far and wide.

And then Sinead Hanley is the the illustrator of the book and she just did such an incredible job of bringing to life characters to support everything that we talk about, move your body, nourish your body, enjoy your body, respect your body, be kind to your body and be kind to others.

Fiona: Did you have to shape or change much of the lyrics to suit the book form or were you able to keep it like par for par?

Taryn: Par for par.

[3:48] fiona: Oh, wow, that's amazing.

Taryn: Yeah, easiest book I've ever written because it was a song and we turned it straight into a book. But I think the real joy of this book for me has been going to schools and watching kids read it and coming up with their own dance actions whilst they're listening to the song.

It's a really beautiful, joyous book and it's very bright and very yellow and it's doing exactly what I'd hoped it would do. I guess in a subliminal way, teaching our kids about how incredible their bodies are and all the adventures they can go on with their bodies.

[4:22] fiona: You've also written a few adult books on the topic of positive body image. What was it like shifting your focus to originally a children's song but then a children's book?

[4:32] Taryn: Yeah, I mean, I think whenever there's been a need for a resource, it's I guess just challenging yourself to be flexible and nimble enough to produce what's required. And whether that's film or books, kids' books, adults' books, whatever it needs to be, we're very committed and very focused and very passionate about this subject of body image. So if there's a need for for a resource, we'll just upskill ourselves to be able to deliver on it.

Fiona: It feels like that's a common thing. If there's a topic or a resource that needs to be done, people will work together to be there, even if that's not the skills that they have, they will work hard to bring that resource to fruition.

Taryn: Yeah, I mean, and it's also collaboration, collaboration over competition always, like how can we work together to fill the gap, to provide a resource where there's a need.

So, and it's quite amazing, actually, I wasn't a filmmaker, I wasn't an author, have been able to do these things. And it's actually something I'm very passionate about that we only put the limits on ourselves in life, in our careers and what we can do because of rules or what we tell ourselves. That if we can dial up that self-compassionate voice, it's quite remarkable what you're capable of.

[5:45] fiona: With it being a picture book and on such an important topic, what was the process like planning how the characters in the book would look?

Taryn: Yeah, I mean, it was about, you know, the core value being around celebrating diversity. So just when we walked down the street, all the different people that we see in the shapes and the sizes and abilities and colours.

[6:06] So to us, it actually really wasn't that hard to create these characters because it's just a representation of who we are in the world.

Fiona: What was it like working with Sinead on the book? Because obviously you had been involved with writing the lyrics and then turning into a book. So what was it like now sharing that song with an extra person and making this book together?

Taryn: I think it's really easy for me to share because I think collaboration for me is probably one of the best parts of my job is learning from other people's skills, working in a team environment, being challenged yourself. I mean, I can't, I mean I shouldn't say I can't draw because I can, it's not very good, certainly not like Sinead, but you know, you find inspiration in other people's talents.

[6:53] And I think the whole process with Pevan and Sarah, with Sinead, with Penguin, recording the song, it's all been a really beautiful process.

[7:03] fiona: So why is it important that students and younger children have access to these messages that you've included in your book?

Taryn: Well unfortunately we live in a world that tells us to be, you know, different and to change who we are and the sentiment of this book is to be just who you are and you're unique and we're all different and to celebrate diversity.

I think it's a really important message that we get in as early as we can so we can build those building blocks and those foundations so as kids get older and they are exposed to more messages in advertising, in the media, on social media, whatever they are, that it's almost like we can armour them from a young age to protect them.

So, you know, when anyone says 'be different', it doesn't even get into their head to think to be different because they celebrate exactly who they are.

Fiona: Very much having that foundation of self-confidence and self-love and very much embracing who you are and the body that you have.

Taryn: That's right, and also that your body is not an ornament in life, it's the vehicle.

You're here to enjoy life, go on adventures, have fun, and what we're teaching kids is that the least interesting thing about you is how you look.

It's about who you are, it's about what you do. It's about what you contribute to the world.

Fiona: So why is positive body image a topic so close to your heart?

[8:25] Taryn: Yeah, I mean, I have my own body image story, and if I was to really simplify it down, it was, I once hated my body. I learned to embrace my body. It felt like winning the golden ticket. It was a feeling that I wanted for as many people in the world as possible.

And my dad always taught me that if you know something that can help others, then it's your duty and your responsibility to stand up and help and support.

So it was all very unexpected, this past 11 years now working in the space of body image, I didn't think that I would be here, but super grateful that I am because I experience every day the joy and the freedom that comes from embracing my body, and I think it's important for anyone who's listening, you don't have to love your body, you could like your body, you could be okay with your body, you just be neutral about your body.

Those things are equally as powerful.

But I just also wanna tap people on the shoulder and remind them that we get 28,000 days on the planet if we're really lucky. We're not meant to spend them at war with our bodies.

[9:29] fiona: And as we mentioned before, you're also a filmmaker. How different is the filmmaking process to creating a book, whether it's this one or the other books you've written?

Taryn: Yeah, filmmaking is years of work. Not to say that books can't be as well, but there's certainly a lot of moving parts to a film.

And it takes a really large team of people to bring it together, and I always like to acknowledge it's never one person that does any of these sort of, you know, produces these resources and in particular film. I think we had sort of 30-odd crew who were working on this film.

The first one was released in 2016, Embrace, and then Embrace Kids was released last year.

Film is just such a powerful way of conveying a message and educating in a way that people just don't even know they're being educated to. You know, it's really enjoyable listening to people's stories, and Embrace Kids for me is a real opportunity to meet kids where they're at and talk about some of the big issues that they're facing and to give them an alternative narrative to the one that the world wants them to know and to feel inspired by their peers and the people that they see on the screen.

[10:45] fiona: Now going back to your book, Embrace Your Body, it's been out for a couple of years but do you have any more books in the works or ideas in your brain of what you want to do next with books?

Taryn: I've just finished writing my next book that comes out next year, so I don't even know if I can talk about it yet, but there's that one, and there's a couple more happening at the same time, so who knew that this next book will be my fifth book.

I really enjoy the process of kids' books, so I think there's more to come.

I've just got to get through Australian of the Year. Every day's a really big day, so I've just got to get through this year, but I think I'll end up doing anything that continues to help people to embrace their bodies, that's what I'm here to do.

Fiona: Now the challenge has wrapped up for 2023, but we want everyone to keep reading. How important has reading been in your life?

Taryn: So I'm one of these people that reads 10 books at a time, because I find it really hard to focus on just one book.

[11:42] And so I actually recently went on my honeymoon and, you know, I was reading five books on my honeymoon. But I love books, I love falling out of the real world and into another.

[11:54] And I'm also really enjoying in more recent times, a reduction in the amount of time I spend on a screen.

So all of those occasions where you would just naturally just pull out your phone because you're waiting at the bus stop, or you're waiting at a doctor's appointment or whatever those moments are, I'm making sure at the moment, I'm always pulling out a book instead of. And it's amazing what that can do for your mental health and just how nice it is to be off screens.

Fiona: Yeah, I must admit, it's always nice seeing people on the trains or the buses pull out a book and have a bit of a read on their way to work or on their way home.

Taryn: Yeah, it used to be the norm. Now it's kind of flipped around completely the other way, but I suspect as people become more intuitive in their bodies and feeling good about their bodies, that they'll continue to make better choices for their health and happiness, and I think we all know, we don't need to be told that picking up a book's better than picking up a phone, or at least it's getting the balance of that.

Fiona: And now before we let you go, I'm going to ask you a couple of rapid fire questions, and I just want the first answer that pops into your head.

Taryn: I hate these. No, kidding.

That's okay. I love these.

Fiona: What is your favourite book?

Taryn: The first book that came to mind was actually Grace Tame's book that I'm reading at the moment. It's not my favourite book though.

Fiona: Non-fiction or fiction?

Taryn: I don't have a preference. Any book's a good book.

Fiona: Favourite genre?

[13:21] Taryn: Oh, again, I mean, I love self-help. I love [Brené](https://www.amazon.com/Self-Help-Bren%C3%A9-Brown-Books/s?rh=n%3A4736%2Cp_lbr_one_browse-bin%3ABren%C3%A9+Brown) Brown's books because I love people's minds and the way they think., and I love kind of, you know, levelling up and doing better and thinking differently. So yeah, I love a good self-help book.

Fiona: And in the spirit of the Premier's Reading Challenge, how many books do you hope to read in 2023?

Taryn: I want to finish the books that I'm reading. So I reckon if we said I could finish a couple of books a month, you know, let's aim for 24 in the year.

[13:47] Music.

[13:57] fiona: You've been listening to Between Our Pages, a Premier's Reading Challenge WA podcast.

Thanks to our guest, Taryn Brumfitt for joining me on this episode.

If you want to keep up to date about future podcast episodes, you can follow the Premier's Reading Challenge Facebook and Instagram pages at Premier's Reading Challenge WA.

Thank you for listening, happy reading. We'll see you next time.

[14:16] Music.