

Philip D.: Hello, inclusion believers, and welcome to the Access Champions Podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dallmann, for this week's journey into the galaxies of accessibility, diversity, and inclusion. Uh, we have, another great episode for you this week. Uh, we have our first return guest, uh, Michelle Bishop, the, uh, voting specialist from the National Disability Rights Network, NDRN, joins us again. Um, you, you know what, with mid-term elections coming I thought it'd be nice for her to come back in, and, and, and chime in with some, some action items, some things to look for. Whether you're a voter with a disability, or an ally, you know, there many things that we can do to make sure that everyone has the, the equal opportunity to, uh, execute their civil right, uh, to vote, um, and, uh, she does just that.

Philip D.: Two quick shout outs, uh, this week. Um, first to the National Disability Theater, newly launched National Disability Theater, uh, and it's being led by Mickey Rowe and Talleri McRae , uh, two fantastic access champions, um, and has a laundry list of advisory company members including Micah Fowler, Ali Stroker, Zach Anner, Maysoon Zayid, um, Haben Girma, Jamie Brewer, Joshua Castille, Ryan Haddad, um, a- and it goes on, and on, and on, of just very artists, um, who happen to have a disability.

Philip D.: Um, really excited, uh, that this is happening. Hopefully we can have Mickey and Talleri on the podcast soon to talk about it. Um, but for those of you who have followed us on social media, you'll remember, uh, Mickey was the keynote speaker at the Kennedy Center LEAD Conference this past summer. Um, and we have some great quotes and, uh, uh from him, uh, on our social media. If you scroll back, I'm sure our, uh, champion intern, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown, will, will run a few of those back this week, um, as well.

Philip D.: Uh, our second shout out is to Hulu, uh, who announced, I believe it was this week, that they are committed to audio description for all their content, uh, following the lead of Netflix, uh, which is great. Again, making more and more content accessible and making the art innately, uh, inclusive. And, uh, what I would like to put there ... I'd love to hear from any of our listeners who do use the audio description services on either Hulu and/or Netflix or general cable, um, and I'd love to just hear a little bit of feedback about, uh, the quality, um, what can make it better, what's really great about it, um, and, and, and, just general perspective. And any audio describers out there that are listening, I'd love to hear from you, um, in your perspective on that, as well. Um, so, uh, feel free to reach out to us on social media at Access Champion on Twitter and Instagram, um, and, uh, accesschampion@gmail.com. Um, I promise you we don't bite. We'd love to have a conversation.

Philip D.: Uh, finally, I am recording, uh, this intro on Saturday of this week. Um, the exact date being October 27th. Uh, and unfortunately, this morning, uh, uh, there was, um, as I'm sure ... it will be Tuesday by the time this is, uh, dropping. But, uh, there was a mass shooting, uh, this morning at a synagogue in pittsburgh.

Um, and I don't have a lot of words on it. Um, but I did feel that it ... uh, I did feel that it needed to be addressed. And, uh, I mean, first and foremost, my heart breaks for everyone affected directly there, um, for those families who, who, who lost people today. Um, lost loved ones. Um, and, and second, it, it, it breaks my heart, um, that this kind of hate exists. Um, you know, it's the complete counter to, uh, the mission of this podcast, my personal mission as, uh, a human.

Philip D.: Um, and I think that's what I want to put out there right now, is ... and, and if you're listening to the podcast, I know that I'm likely preaching to the choir. Um, but, you know, I had the opportunity to teach at NYU this week. And, uh, speak to some folks, you know, a generation behind me. Um, and I saw a significant amount of inclusive thinking already. But we have to continue teaching that. We have to continue emphasizing the common humanity of us all. Uh, we're all here, together, in this. We're, we're all human. Um, it's why, uh, I work so hard in the world of accessibility ... is because, um, as Evan [Hatfield 00:05:23] said on the other side of access is someone's humanity. It's why I work so hard at inclusion, and why so many of you work so hard at inclusion, because you believe that everyone deserves to be represented. They deserve to have equal rights. They deserve to participate. And, um, across all activities. Arts, sports, etc. Voting, in the case of this week's episode.

Philip D.: Um, and, you know, I don't have the solution. Um, I would like to think that there was, there would be a breaking point for, for all of this. Uh, for action to happen, uh, legislatively. I don't know that there is, uh, at this point. I, uh, I will say I'm a little bit, um, uh, unsure if that will happen. Um, what I do know is that, um, in moments like these, uh, we continue to do the work, we must continue to do the work, we must continue to advocate. We must continue to march. Um, and we have to be uncomfortable allies, at times. And I say that because we're ... you know, um, it's very easy ... or, I don't want to say it's very easy. Um, but it's one thing to repost and share and, and even host a podcast. Um, it, it's another thing to, to continue being an active and, and, and vocal, uh advocate for change and for love and, again, for humanity.

Philip D.: And what I'm going to put out there ... I, um, I do this podcast and I, and I do, uh, you know ... a year ago I wore a, a Black Lives Matter tie to work for about six months in a row, um, because I wanted, I wanted to make some people uncomfortable. And I wanted to have conversations, uncomfortable conversations in that way about why I supported that movement and what that meant to me. I, I have not marched, um, in any of the movements. Uh, I, I don't love crowds. Uh, gives me some anxiety. But what I'm going to commit to all of you in, in ... today, is to being an uncomfortable ally, and I will be more physically present in these movements, these movements for change and these movements for love and these movements for equality. Even though it makes me uncomfortable, I need to be there. We all need to be there. We all need to participate, however we can.

Philip D.: Um, and so, that, that, that's that. That is my commitment that I am putting out there. And, uh, I hope ... I hope all of you, uh, will follow suit, um, and, and participate in uncomfortable conversations and be an uncomfortable ally until we are all comfortable as humans. So, uh, thank you, um, for listening to this podcast. Thank you for all of you who share these messages of inclusion. Um, and, and we continue. We continue.

Philip D.: And now, without further ado, return Access Champion Michelle Bishop.

Philip D.: Alright. And we are here wi, once again, with Michelle Bishop, the, a voting rights specialist at the National Disability Rights Network, NDRN for short. Thanks for coming back on the podcast, Michelle.

Michelle B.: Oh, thanks for having me. I'm so happy to be back.

Philip D.: Um, as we were, were just discussing right before I hit record, um, yeah, I was sitting here ... uh, I'm going to be out of town, um, during midterms. And I was filling out all this stuff to get my absentee ballot, and I realized, you know, we, we had done, uh, an, this episode on, on voting rights months ago. Um, but midterms are right around the corner. Uh, and what, what more of an appropriate time to have you back on.

Philip D.: So, you know, I'd love to hear, uh, a, j, I guess a little bit about what's going on in your world right now in your world right now?

Michelle B.: Oh, gosh. (laughs)

Philip D.: (laughs)

Michelle B.: It's a busy time! Right now is kind of a whirlwind ...

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: ... of we're really in that sweet spot where we're just barely out from the midterm election, so for the most part a lot of those voter registration deadlines have passed. Um, although in some places you can register to vote right up through Election Day, so it's worth checking and knowing if you're listening and you're not sure if your deadline has passed.

Michelle B.: But for the most part, it's about getting voters ready to go for Election Day and making sure everyone's excited and they're ready to vote and they've kind of made their plan and thought about how they're going to vote. So it's a hectic time, but it's also probably the most exciting time.

Philip D.: (laughs) Yeah, it sounds like, uh, th, there's quite a few things to, to be done. But that, that's very exciting.

Philip D.: Um, what are, uh, some of the things that are happening to, to prepare folks to vote?

Michelle B.: Well, I think it's ... When we get this close to election it's all about making your plan to vote and thinking it through step by step. So I've been talking a lot with voters and advocates who want to suppo, support voters about what that means.

Michelle B.: And I think the first step is you want to check your voter registration and make sure you're registered. Make sure you're still on the rolls. If you're registered, you should be on the roles, but accidents happen and nobody wants a surprise on Election Day. So checking and making sure you're on the rolls ... Is my name current? Is my address current? A lot of that stuff you can still change even if the voter registration deadline has passed. So, reaching out to your local elections officials or going online and checking that info.

Michelle B.: And then it's just about thinking in really practical terms about what Election Day means to you. "How am I going to get to my polling place?" "Do I know if my polling place is accessible to me? And how can I find out?" "How am I going to cast my ballot? Am I going to hand mark a piece of paper? Am I going to use a touch screen machine?" "Who or what am I going to vote for?" And if you haven't, you know, looked at a sample ballot yet, you want to do that and really think it through. And then, um, "How am I going to get home from my polling place?"

Michelle B.: It's, it's ... They sound like really simple little things. But if you haven't thought through all those steps, especially if you're a newer voter, then Election Day can actually be really intimidating.

Philip D.: Absolutely. Um, if, if I were a voter and I find that the, my polling place is, in fact, not accessible to me. What, what options do I have out there?

Michelle B.: We just talked about this last time, that only about 40% of America's polling places are actually fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: And that's actually, um, on the rise. (laughs) We started from 18%, and we pushed it all the way up to 40%. So it's this awkward thing where I'm somewhat really proud of that number, but also really sad that it's still less than half.

Michelle B.: So this is a problem that people run into. The best thing you can do is to try to find out before Election Day. And I would contact your local elections officials. You can find out the location, and the location itself might be phenomenally accessible if you go and visit. Uh, and that can be helpful, as well. But some of it also comes down to how things are set up on Election Day, and how they set up

the voting station. What doors are they using and the accessible path of travel that leads to that door? And all of those little things.

Michelle B.: So you want to talk to your elections officials and make sure that they've thought all that through and that they're going to be using the space in a way that's accessible to you. If you get there on Election Day-

Philip D.: And how can we-

Michelle B.: Mm-hmm (affirmative)?

Philip D.: Um, oh ... And, and how ... and, and this may be different everywhere. But how can one find out the contact information for our local election officials?

Michelle B.: I'm going to tell you, I always say the easiest thing to do ... just Google it. Just Google the name of your-

Philip D.: That's great. (laughs)

Michelle B.: (laughs)

Philip D.: When in doubt, you know, "Listen-"

Michelle B.: When in doubt, Google it. If you Google elections and the name of your county, something's going to come up.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: A lot of them have a website ...

Philip D.: Okay.

Michelle B.: ... and that should come up right away. Some of the smaller counties don't have a website, but their contact info should come up. There's, I'm sure, a website somewhere that collects all that information. But that's ... trying to remember that URL is probably not any easier than just doing a quick Google search.

Philip D.: Oh, absolutely. That's great. Um, yeah ... (laughs). I love it.

Michelle B.: (laughs)

Philip D.: It always does just come down to Google. Uh-

Michelle B.: Sometimes it does. I mean ... (laughs) they've-

Philip D.: Uh, oh, absolutely, uh-

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Michelle B.: They've actually added a lot of elections information as well. You can probably find a lot (laughs) these days through a Google search and through your social media.

Philip D.: (laughs)

Michelle B.: Uh, but I will say, I've ... some, some phone numbers and websites probably worth remembering to me are ...

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: ... who you should contact if things go wrong on Election Day. Right? You can, you can ...

Philip D.: Okay.

Michelle B.: ... make your plan to vote, you can have the best laid plans, but a lot of what happens to voters with disabilities on Election Day comes down to how we implement all of that. Even if we have a really great location ...

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: ... and we're using some really cool voting equipment, if it's, you know, not being set up responsibly, if poll workers are, um, asking us questions they shouldn't be or challenging us on things they shouldn't be, then things can fall apart really quickly on Election Day.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: And it's really intimidating for some voters. And it's really not fair ...

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: ... to put all the burden on the voters to have to advocate for themselves. So we do have some resources. I would say, first and foremost, you can call your P and A, your Protection and Advocacy, in your state. And if you don't know them, you can go to our website, ndrn.org ... it's National Disability Rights Network. So, ndrn.org. And click on this thing that says, "Find Help in Your State," with this little map of the U.S. that's on the top right corner. They want to help you.

Michelle B.: You can also call Election Protection. That's the 866-OUR-VOTE hotline, like, O-U-R-V-O-T-E hotline. You can look them up online, as well, at 866ourvote.org, because there's actually a number of hotlines. That main hotline is in English. But they have another hotline that's in English and Spanish. A hotline that's been-

Philip D.: Oh, great.

Michelle B.: Yes! And, wait. It gets even better! (laughs)

Philip D.: Oh, no! (laughs)

Michelle B.: There's even more! They have, um-

Philip D.: Sorry, I got excited too early. (laughs)

Michelle B.: They have, um, hotlines that are English and Middle Eastern languages and hotlines that are actually in English and sometimes up to, like, nine different Asian languages. So even if English is not your first language ...

Philip D.: Oh, that's fantastic.

Michelle B.: ... you're not completely comfortable in English as a hotline that you can call ... And this is really exciting, NED, National Association of the Deaf, launched a new hotline this year that's in ASL.

Philip D.: Oh, that's amazing.

Michelle B.: It's so cool! I'm really excited about it. So that number is 301-818-VOTE. And it's, it's a video phone line. So you can actually call in that on a video phone and talk to someone at ASL to get assistance, as well.

Philip D.: That's fantastic. Uh, that's just, that's just great. Um, so, uh, you know, one of the things that, um, we've been talking a little bit about on the podcast is, um, ally work. Um, and, you know, what are, what are some things that the folks out there that want to help can possibly do, uh, to help ... you know, our, our friends and family and community members with disabilities, um, you know, have the best possible Election Day?

Michelle B.: Well, that's a great question. And I think there's so many things that allies can do. If you know people personally in your life with, people with disabilities that you want to be active in voting and you want ... help them be able to cast that ballot, then I think that you can do a lot. I think it's important for friends and family and loved ones just to talk to each other about voting. Uh, even if we disagree on the issues, we should still be talking to each other about how important it is that we all go vote. Ask each other, i ... "Are you registered?" "Is your registration up to date?" "Do you know how you're getting to your polling place?" "Can I help get you there?"

Michelle B.: People with disabilities, or people who are not proficient in English, may also want to have someone come with them to assist them to vote. And they actually have a federal right to that as part of the Voting Rights Act, that you can

bring anyone you want, other than your union rep or employer, with you to assist you to vote.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: And if you don't have anyone, the poll workers will help you, and they'll kind of send you one Democrat and one Republican just to make sure nothing goes wrong and nothing tricky happens. But you can bring someone with you who you trust to help you understand and cast your ballot. And that's an awesome role for allies. Sometimes that is what makes the difference, especially for newer voters who are really nervous about the process and haven't been through this before.

Michelle B.: Because once you've done it, it's really not scary at all. But if you haven't been down that road yet, and you're not sure what's going to happen when you go into your polling place, it can be a little intimidating.

Michelle B.: Um, making sure people have ... know what type of ID they need and have the right type of ID. Helping someone to go get that ID if they need it. I also think that allies ...

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: ... really play an important role in also letting us know what's going on on Election Day. I'm really involved in the Election Protection coalition. I work some of those calls myself that are disability related.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Michelle B.: Sometimes, we get calls about something that's inaccessible or a poll worker interacting inappropriately with a voter with disability. And we get the call from a non-disabled person who's just also in line to vote, who sees that and thinks, "That's wrong!" And makes the decision to call it in.

Michelle B.: Uh, I think that's, that's very powerful. You know, if you, if you see something, say something, sort of motto.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Michelle B.: Um, you know, there's a lot of great allies out there who recognize that stuff, and they want the vote to be accessible for everyone because they get how democracy works. Uh, jump in. Don't be shy. You can also volunteer. Volunteer to be a poll worker. Volunteer to work for something like Election Protection, where you can be an advocate at the polls on Election Day, making sure everyone gets to cast their ballots. There's so many different ways to get involved, uh, but I think at the bottom line, if everyone votes and everyone talks

to each other about how important it is and how much it matters to me as someone who loves you that you vote, that could be very powerful.

Philip D.: Fantastic. Yeah. I think, uh, what great action items, uh, for all the allies out there. So, a, any other, any other thoughts as we head into the election? I mean, we've covered a lot, very quickly. (laughs)

Michelle B.: (laughs) We did! Can you tell I'm in go mode right now, for the election? (laughs)

Philip D.: I love it. I love it. Listen, it's a marathon and a sprint. You know? (laughs) All at the same time. But, yeah. I, I mean, I'm very excited. Obviously, um, I know you ... as you were saying, I mean, you guys started with 18% of polling places being accessible, and you're at 40. And while that number is not where you want it to be, that, that, that's really great! You know? That's a huge jump, uh, in, in, you know, not a lot of time. Um, and, you know, while the ADA has been around for 30 years and things should be better, um, I do think it's important to, to look at that progress and go, "Alright. Cool. We're, we're definitely moving in the right direction."

Philip D.: So, I, I do want to take a moment and say, uh, thank you, and thank you to NDRN for the work that you guys are doing, uh, in making that progress. I know it's not the end goal yet, but where you guys have gotten so far is really great.

Michelle B.: Thank you! I appreciate that. And I want to give a shout out to voters. People with disabilities who go out and vote, you make it happen. When, when our poll workers and elections officials and your friends and neighbors see people with disabilities going to vote, that's the moment when it clicks in their brains that it actually really matters that we thinking about ... we think about making it accessible beforehand. That, that's when it happens.

Michelle B.: I can say it 'till I'm blue in the face. And sometimes we have people who run elections say things to us, like, "Well, we don't have to worry about that because we don't have any people with disabilities in our county."

Philip D.: (laughs)

Michelle B.: (laughs)

Philip D.: What?

Michelle B.: I know! There's no way that's possible. Right? There's just ... there's so many of us ...

Philip D.: Oh, my God.

Michelle B.: ... all over the country. There's no way it's true. And what I say back is, "I think you don't know they're there because your polling places aren't accessible, so you've never seen them show up to vote!"

Michelle B.: So we, we need the voters. Like, show up! If your polling place isn't accessible, you show up and you ask them what your options are if they can't accommodate you. And push that boundary. That's what makes it real for people. That's when they figure out, "Oh, shoot! We should have thought about this before Election Day." And maybe next time around, things will go a lot smoother.

Michelle B.: So I just want to say thank you to voters. You make it possible. You're making the change. And your vote is important.

Philip D.: Fantastic. Well, thank ... again, thank you, uh, Michelle, again, for coming back on the podcast, um, and, uh, I am sure we'll have you on back again. This is, this is a, a, always a topic in, uh, the world, uh, voting rights. So, thank you so much.

Michelle B.: Thank you. Abs ... You know I'll come back. I would love to. I bet we'll be talking again before 2020.

Philip D.: Oh, absolutely.

Michelle B.: (laughs) Thanks.

Philip D.: Thank you again to Michelle for joining us this week. Um, I know it's a crazy time, uh, down there, with, with, uh, midterms coming up. And, uh, as you all heard, there's, there's definitely a significant amount of work to be done. I, I hope all of you, uh, enjoyed her tips, um, both those of you who are voters with disabilities and those of you who are allies. Um, and, and again, we can all help move, uh, more equality ... move to more equality in our, in our voting, um, here, uh, in the United States. And abroad, for that matter. If ... I know we are, we are listened to in, in a couple different countries, um, uh, that I believe are all democracies, as well. Um, so, you know, look up where ... who are your advocates in, in your country, um, for voting equality and let's, let's definitely support them.

Philip D.: Um, thank you again to our producer, Matt Kerstetter, for making us sound great each and every single week. Um, this podcast just would not happen without him. So, uh, we are eternally grateful for him. Uh, thank you to Eric Walton for that amazing theme song. And as always, thank you to our Champion intern, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown, who does so much for this, for this podcast. Uh, she is truly amazing.

Philip D.: Um, we'll be back again, uh, next week with another great episode. And remember, inclusion believers, never stop running through that brick wall.

