

Philip D.: Hello inclusion believers, and welcome to the Access Champion Podcast. I'm your host Phil Dallmann for this week's journey into the galaxy of accessibility, diversity and inclusion.

Philip D.: Ah, we got another great episode for you this week, ah, really excited to be joined by Megan Carranza, host and creator of the Adventures in Autism Podcast.

Philip D.: Ah, Megan is an autism mom, ah, who is doing the thing and sharing the thing really related to her in that, you know, she saw a gap. Um, while there were autism podcasts out there, um, they weren't necessarily filling the need that she, she felt she needed, um, and that she felt others could use, um, which was a little bit more of the day-to-day, nitty-gritty kind of, um, ah, podcast rather than technical and research and all that.

Philip D.: So, um, really excited to share that conversation with you. Um, and a-, after having that conversation, um, I did wanna put it out there, um, any, any parents, ah, out there who have navigated the world of accessibility, diversity and inclusion, um, I'd, I'd love to have you on, um, I'd love to hear your perspective. Ah, so if you are a parent out there and you think, "Well, you know, I, I don't have much to say," I bet you, you do. And, ah, I'd love to chat with you about it. Um, so, ah, this is me putting out the call to, to all parents.

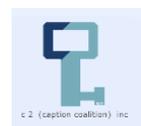
Philip D.: Kids out there, if you think your parents, ah, could bring a unique perspective to the conversations of access, diversity and inclusion, um, tell them about the podcast and let's connect. Ah, we can be reached at accesschampion@gmail.com, ah, as well on social media @ Access Champion on Instagram and Twitter and The Access Champion Podcast on Facebook.

Philip D.: Ah, speaking of Facebook, um, really appreciate for all the love, ah, we've gotten on there, um, our likes are through the roof, it's really wonderful. Um, I'm putting an ask out there, um, for those of you listening to the podcast, if you could take, ah, 30 seconds and write a quick review for us, um, it just helps our overall, ah, appeal to potential donors, potential sponsors, things of that nature and we wanna keep this podcast going.

Philip D.: So, ah, we'd really appreciate it if you guys could take 30 seconds to do that thing. And if you have a full minute, you know, feel free to share the podcast and invite your friends to like it as well. The more listeners we have the better, ah, as we share these, these stories, these anecdotes, these, ah, theories, these practical applications of, ah, accessibility, diversity and inclusion across race, gender, sexuality and disability. Um, so very, very excited to continue, ah, this podcast and, ah, continue all of those conversations.

Philip D.: Um, that's all the business we have. Quick and, quick and easy to, to start the show, so let's dive right on in. Access Champion, Megan Carranza.

Philip D.: All right, and we are here with Megan Carranza who is the host and creator of the podcast Adventures in Autism. Ah, thanks for joining us Megan.



Megan C.: Thank you so much for having me.

Philip D.: Ah, so you are another guest brought to us by our producer, Matt Kerstetter. Ah, we, we just had, ah, our episode 30 was also brought by Matt Kerstetter. Our producer is just really killing the game, ah, ah, in his producing role. Um, how, how do you know Matt?

Megan C.: I actually don't know Matt-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... but my brother, also named Matt, ah, his friends with him. My, my brother, um, he, shout out to my brother Matt Mitchell.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: Um, he is a, ah, really cool dude and he lives in, he lives in New Jersey actually but he does a lot of, um, improv and, like, backstage work at, um, The PIT-

Philip D.: Oh great.

Megan C.: ... in New York. And so that's, that's how him and Matt know each other. So, my brother, when I first started my podcast was working as, like, my height boy.

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: And, yeah, he was steering it. (Laughs).

Philip D.: I love it.

Megan C.: Um, that's how Matt, your Matt found him. So, and then he was like, "Hey ... " He was like, "My ... I pro-, produce this other podcast and I think your sister might be good for it." So, that was kind of how the ball got rolling.

Philip D.: Well, I love it. Matt on Matt loving-

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: ... so it'll be great. (Laughs).

Megan C.: Definitely. And then my, my brother Matt, and I know your Matt and you, 'cause I've listened to your podcast, are all fans of the Pro Wrestling. (Laughter). So that was how, ah, the two Matts kind of bonded because they both, they both love the wrestling so ... (Laughs).

Philip D.: There you go. Ah-



Megan C.: Yes. (Laughs).

Philip D.: It is, it is no small secret, my love of the professional wrestling.

Megan C.: (laughs).

Philip D.: I, ah, was just talking to a friend, ah, the other day, ah, about what a, um, moment in time it was when I decided to reveal to my finance, who was a very new girlfriend at the time-

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: ... ah, that I loved professional wrestling. Ah, in that she just wanted to hang out on a Sunday night and it happened to be the Royal Rumble. (Laughter). Ah, and, ah, I was like, "Please don't leave me but also I love Roy-, I love professional wrestling." (Laughs).

Megan C.: I mean, hey, just, like, lay it all on the table. If it's meant to be, it's meant to be.

Philip D.: And now we have the Intercontinental Championship and a Lucedor mask in our living room so I'm, I'm doing all right.

Megan C.: Okay.

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: All right. She accepted you. (Laughs).

Philip D.: She did, she embraced it. So, you have this fantastic podcast, Adventures in Autism.

Megan C.: Yes.

Philip D.: Um, tell me a little bit about your, your journey to not only this podcast but, you know, you are, ah, sort of the epitome o-, of, of an advocate out there now as well.

Megan C.: Thank you. Um, that is a title I wear very proudly. Okay, so ... All right, get comfy-

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: ... 'cause I'll start at the beginning. So, um, I, I am a mother of three. I have like three little kids. My oldest, Logan, will be six next month and then I have a two and a half year old named Liliana and a six-month-old daughter named Layla.

Megan C.: And my oldest child, my son Logan, was diagnosed with autism almost two years ago. And, um, it was definitely a, um ... I don't wanna say, like, a, a rough road. I have a hard time, I never wanna make anything sound negative, I always wanna (laughs) spin, spin



the positive. But I will say that after he was diagnosed, like newly diagnosed, I really was having a hard time finding that support piece.

Philip D.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Megan C.: Um, I think that, you know, whe-, when you have a child on the spectrum, or I would imagine like any special needs, ah, you just, you, you need to talk to someone who understands.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Absolutely.

Megan C.: In, in, in a good way and a bad way.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Megan C.: You know, you just, you, you need that, that support, like I was saying. And I love listening to podcasts. So, there was one day where I was, like, driving my car and I'm like, "Oh, I should see if I can find, like, a good autism podcast to listen to." And this was a couple of years ago so there's, there actually is more now, but there was, like, very, very few at the time. And the ones that I could find were, like, really medical-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... or, like, very formal. And not that they didn't have their place and they were interesting, but it was like I wanted to hear someone who was kind of like me (laughs), like, just kind of talking about, you know, life having a child on the spectrum. Especially because, like I said, Logan was like newly diagnosed at this time.

Philip D.: Yeah, somebody-

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: ... living the day-to-day.

Megan C.: Yes. The, the day-to-day but also, like, maybe a little glimpse into what the future may look like for us-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... like as, you know, a family and just, like, navigating this diagnosis. Because I mean, you know, when you have, when you have a baby nobody expects to have this on their plate. You just think, like, "Everything's gonna be great. I'm gonna have this baby and he's gonna be healthy and wonderful." And, you know, especially with something like autism where it's, it's not like from the jump you-, you're gonna be able to see this.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Megan C.: You know, it's something over time it's gonna come out. And that's exactly what had happened with, with our son. It was really like the first year everything was, you know, peachy keen jelly bean, everything was like perfect. And then once he hit about ... Like, I would say a year was when it started to occur to me that there was maybe a little bit of, like, a delay, like he was, he only had a couple of words and he was not really answering to his name very often. Um, but it was nothing, like, major at that time.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: But it was just, like, kind of as time went on those, the delay never really seemed to catch up to where it should be. And then there was also, like, more behaviors kind of coming out. So, it was probably when he was, um, he was like three when we finally decided, "Okay, we, we definitely wanna, you know, go ahead and get him, like, a full evaluation," to see, ah, what the diagnosis would be. And unfortunately, and this is something that I've talked to a lot of parents about at this time, it's, it's really hard to even get with a doctor at that point. So, we were on, like, a six- to eight-month waiting list, so it was like by the time-

Philip D.: Really? At, at three years old-

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: ... they, there was, they weren't, it was taking forever to get in?

Megan C.: It was taking forever to get in. And I, so I live in Chicago-

Philip D.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... or like a suburb of Chicago.

Philip D.: I'm fa-, I'm familiar with there, where in the burbs?

Megan C.: Oh, I live in Elgin, Illinois.

Philip D.: Okay.

Megan C.: (Laughs). Um, I'm from Naperville though, that's where I grew up. My parents still live there.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: Um, are you, are you from there?

Philip D.: No, no. I, ah, I, ah, for a short I, ah, for a short period of time in my life I, ah, dated a young woman who was attending Northwestern so I spent a lot of time in Evanston and, and in the surrounding area.

Megan C.: Oh, okay.

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: Gotcha. Okay. Very familiar with Evanston. I've lived here my whole life so I know-

Philip D.: Okay.

Megan C.: ... I know all the places. (Laughter). Um, but anyway so yeah, it was, it really was taking, it ... The, the wait lists are just ridiculous and from, from my podcast, just all the people that I've had on, and even not, not just in my area, it seems like that's kind of, like, the standard-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... is you're, you're just gonna have to wait that, that amount of time. Ah, which is horrible because it's like you, you know, you know there's something going on and you, you wanna get to the bottom of it, you wanna figure it out, but now you're just like stuck in limbo. So that was, that was tough. Um, and then finally it was, like, right after he turned four that we got the diagnosis. And we, we knew that it was coming at that point.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: We were, my husband and I were, you know, pretty positive that that was what we were dealing with. Um, it was still definitely very difficult to hear, that was a difficult day, we cried a lot that day. Um, but then honest to God, the next day I woke up and I was like, "Okay, what, what can we do? What is the next step?" So, that was like when I feel like I first kind of stepped into my role as advocate. And not that I wasn't advocating for him before, but it was like once we actually had the diagnosis and we were like, "Okay, it's autism, now we can, like, have a game plan."

Megan C.: And we, we did. We figured out, you know, kind of h-, what therapy to get him into which was also a very long process. Everything takes forever. (Laughter). So that, that was kind of a bummer. Um, like I said, around this same time I, I was trying to maybe find a podcast to listen to. 'Cause I, I enjoy listening to podcasts. I think that when you are hearing someone's story in their own words, with their own voice, it is just a different level of depth that as opposed to, like, reading a blog post.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: So, that was kind of where the idea for my podcast started. Um, but I was like a chicken and just like a procrastinator and I didn't know, you know, how to, I didn't know the first thing about, like, starting a podcast. So, it took me a quite a while to actually (laughter) get the wheels in motion. Um, but last year, like, for, for new year's, I didn't make a resolution but I made a goal, and the goal was to get the podcast out by the end of

2018. So, like, time was rolling on. I was getting towards the end of 2018, it was like back in September when I was finally, "Okay, I gotta do this."

Megan C.: And I was just like, "All right, here we go." And I started the podcast and put it out there and it's been really wonderful. I have gotten such awesome feedback and connected with so many wonderful families and professionals and people that I definitely wouldn't have otherwise. Um, and like I said that support piece and like-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... that sense of community is, like, really coming into fruition which is just phenomenal.

Philip D.: That's fantastic. I can, (laughs), emphasize with, ah, sort of setting that goal and then, and waiting and waiting and waiting. (Laughter). Ah, I, I had a similar situation and, and it took, ah, our producer, Matt, um, turning to me and going, "Yeah, just do the podcast man, just do the podcast." (Laughter). I'm like, "Oh yeah."

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: I was like, "Yeah, no, you're right, okay cool we'll do the thing."

Megan C.: You've gotta just do it.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Megan C.: You've gotta just get it going. 'Cause it is, I mean es-, especially, you know, I'm, I'm sure it's, it's scary for anybody, but, you know, what I'm talking about is, it's very personal.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: It's very, you're very vulnerable. And especially in the beginning, like, I had a lot of people reaching out to me and saying like, "Oh, I love the podcast," and I'd be like, "Hey, do you wanna be a guest?" and they're like, "I don't know. I'm really nervous to share." So, and I still have people who are, like, kind of waiting in the wings to share.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: They're not quite ready yet. Um, and that's fine, like, I, I totally get that because you, you are, you're really putting yourself out there. And like I said, I've been very lucky so far, it's been a really just very positive response. Um, but it's, yeah, it's scary for sure.

Philip D.: Yeah, absolutely. That's quite the journey to, to, to launching the podcast. (Laughter). Um-

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: You know, besides just creating sort of that, that, that voice of, ah, relatability, what, what else do you hope to accomplish with Adventures in Autism?

Megan C.: Well, I really, now I'm looking to find, like, as many different voices as I can within the autism community. Um, I have, I've, I have a lot of just parents, like moms like me-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... where we can just kind of chat about our kids, which is wonderful. Ah, but I've also had a few different, like, non-profits on and, um, I, I'm speaking this week with an author who, she wrote a, a wonderful book called, Why Is He Doing That? It's a children's book about autism and it's kind of, you know, for younger audiences. So really just whatever I can do to, like, support the autism community to, I mean, I hate to say, like, raise awareness, 'cause I do think that sounds like kinda weak (laughs) sometimes.

Megan C.: But at the same time, like, we need awareness. Awareness is so important because ... Especially like, you know, what you guys are talking here with inclusion. I mean, that to me starts with awareness. Like, people need to know what, what autism looks like, what you're dealing with when you are dealing with somebody with autism. And a-, and again it's so different for everyone.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Megan C.: Because, you know, if you've met one person with autism you've met one-

Philip D.: You've met one person with autism.

Megan C.: Autism. (Laughter). Which is, like, the best.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Megan C.: Like, you have to, have to always refer back to that because it's the truth. It's just like you and I are so different, no, no two people with autism are really the same either. So, I think that, that part of it, just raising that awareness is so important. And then from there, that's where we can get, you know, more inclusion, more acceptance, more access, all those things. So, yeah, like I said, I feel like raising awareness sounds kind of weak but at the same time, like, it is a necessary piece to the puzzle.

Philip D.: Yeah, I think that's incredibly important. And I think especially when ... I think at this point people understand that autism is a thing.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: So, like, what you're saying is like, "Oh, autism awareness," like, yes, no, everyone has heard the word or most people-



Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... have heard the word before, um, but the individualization of it, um, and the, ah, individual characteristics that exist within that diagnosis, because it's a massive spectrum-

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: ... ah, that has encapsulated several different things, um, in the last five years, have kind of gotten folded into it. Um, and so now it's, you know, it's a much bigger spectrum than it was even before. And-

Megan C.: Absolute-

Philip D.: And now you're dealing with this idea that, ah, you know, you can have one concept of it, or even a, a concept of the spectrum, and meet somebody tomorrow that completely, ah, is different than anything that you, you preconceived. So, this idea, I think for me, um, when I, I, and the things that I love, when they're in awareness campaigns and things like that, they advocate for the individualization but also the, the need for adaptability-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... um, and flexibility when creating something that you consider accessible, um, to the autism community or the, just the cognitive and developmental disability (laughs), ah, community at large. But i-, if you have, you know, your basic, you go, "Okay great, I need to, you know, have these kind of sensory set-ups and I have, ah, this kind of prep material and great or good," ah, but somebody, you know, needs something a little bit different, like-

Megan C.: Absolute-

Philip D.: You know, having that built-in idea or built-in philosophy to your organization, or frankly your family or, you know, you-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... as an individual, ah, to, to be able to adapt on the fly and be okay with it and not make it feel like an inconvenience and just make it feel like the fact that you are allowing a human, a fellow human to experience something or, ah, learn something or, you know, ah, exist in our world-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... ah, in the same way that, ah, those who identify as neuro-typical do.

Megan C.: Right.

Philip D.: Um, I think that's really, really important.

Megan C.: Well and just like you said, like, like, the sensory piece, 'cause there's ... So, my son, Logan-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... he is what you would call a sensory seeker-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... so he does not have any, really any sensory aversions. So, you know, where there's a lot of people who have an issues like, you know, touching or smelling or things like that-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... with, like, certain, you know, tactile or, or whatever it may be, we don't feel with any of that. Logan is like, "Let me touch it all."

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: "Let me put it in my mouth, let me do everything that I can do." So, it's funny because, like, everyone has these kind of preconceived notions about autism and there definitely are, you know, the, the similarities-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... in, in symptoms that you'll see, like, you know, like hand-flapping or ... Again, my, my son is almost six so it's not like we're dealing with, ah, an adult, this is a child. So it's like, you know, cer-, certain things that you-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... are, are ... I'm trying to think of the right word I'm thinking of. You know, common characteristics of autism.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: You, you'll, you will see that.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Megan C.: But at the same time, ev-, everyone is so different. So, the supports that one person might need, another person is not, is not going to need. And again because it is a



spectrum and it is, you know, so, so very wide, there, there are people who are, you know, obviously super high-functioning and are able to, you know, pretty much get by on their own or completely on their own. But then there are people who, you know, are very dependent and they need to be, they need someone to look after them. And both of those scenarios are completely okay but it's like we need to have, that, that inclusion needs to be a, a piece for everybody.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: So, I think just like getting, getting that out there and just, yeah, spreading that message that like, you know, there's, there is so, such a variation of, of people with autism, I think that that is still not completely understood when you say autism awareness. It's like, "Oh ... " Like, you said, like, "I know what autism is." But, like, until you really are around somebody with autism, you really wouldn't know.

Philip D.: Yeah. I, ah, I often, ah, share the anecdote with classes I teach and stuff, um, that when I dove into this world, I was, I was, you know, substitute teaching, ah, and they offered me a job as an assistant in the autism classroom and I said, "Fantastic. What is autism?"

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: Ah, and (laughs) they were like, "Great, you know, just Google it, you'll be all right."

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: And so I did. And I Googled it, and what I had found initially, and this is, this is many years ago now, um, was, you know, very similar to, you know, Sheldon from The Big Bang Theory and, ah-

Megan C.: Right, or like [inaudible 00:22:14].

Philip D.: Yeah, like Rain Man or, like ... It was very that-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... and I was like, "Great, I got this."

Megan C.: Like, stereotypical.

Philip D.: Oh my God, it was caricatures-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... out to wazoo.

Megan C.: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Philip D.: And then I walked into a classroom, um, w-, with five mostly non-verbal, high-behavior students who were all bigger and-

Megan C.: Oh man.

Philip D.: ... ah, stronger than I was and, ah, my mind was blown. Ah, and so, you know, that was a, a class that like eventually, you know, launched sort of my access journey-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... um, because I fell in love with these students and, ah, their compassion and empathy was beyond anything that I had encountered with anyone that had identified as, ah, neuro-typical before.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um, but they, ah ... Coming in, I, I had this, I had created this idea, ah, over the course of a weekend and (laughter), ah, had my mind blown, ah, you know, 12 hours later. Ah, but-

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: ... the, ah, but that created a much fuller picture and I became, um ... You know, a lot of my conversations with folks when it becomes, when we talk about access in that realm, is to think about the entire spectrum.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um, and again, you know, you, when you are creating access, you know, it's not always practical to initially create something for every aspect of the spectrum, ah, but being willing to create when it is requested or when you encounter someone who wants to use your services but could use a different kind of help, I think that's the difference. Um, you know, at TDF we would create, you know, for our Broadway performances, ah, that were autism-friendly, we'd create, ah, social stories and we'd create character guides.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: And they were created, um, I created most of them, ah, they were reviewed by different specialists but, ah, I did the drafts and, and the bulk of it. And, ah, they were created with broad strokes, ah, of, of the idea of, you know, word choices and the visuals and, and all that and it was painting with broad strokes for the spectrum. But when and if we received requests for any type of specificity the answer was absolutely yes.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



Philip D.: I will. You know, you take the time to do that. And I think that's, that's the, the aspect we're, we're missing in so many, um, parts of our society. I, I mean-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um, to continue painting in broad strokes, ah ... (Laughter). But, like, you know, it's not just ... I, you know, I, I live in the, predominantly in the world of the arts and, and it's, it's getting there, but like education and politics and things like that, we're ... You know, we had on a couple of weeks ago, um, Michelle Bishop who's a, a voting rights specialist as well, um, in, for the National Disability Rights Network, and, um, you know, our citizens with cognitive and developmental disabilities encounter quite a few hurdles-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... ah, in exercising their right to vote. Ah, and, ah, so i-, you know, it, it doesn't, it's, it's all over the place. Um, and so I, I, again, I think things, um ... I think awareness of so important even though, you know, you and I both go, "Ugh, more awareness."

Megan C.: Yeah. (Laughter).

Philip D.: It's like, well, specific awareness is still-

Megan C.: Right.

Philip D.: ... very, very much needed.

Megan C.: Yes. There's a, there's a deeper meaning to awareness-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... ah, that we're referring to. Um, yeah, 'cause I think that ... I mean, I, everything that you're doing is incredible and especially, you know, as an autism mom to, to know that this ... Like I was saying (laughs) before, you know, it's, it's so wonderful that, like, this is a thing. And again, it, it should be a thing but it's like, it's so great that it is because, you know, a few years ago this really wasn't a thing.

Megan C.: So, it's like just knowing that, that things are changing and things are going more in the direction that they should, um, and I think the root of that is, is, you know, just, just that awareness, that getting, getting the word out and having people be, be more understanding, um, again just, just of like how, how diverse the, the spectrum really is. And just that, that compassion piece a little bit too of just-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... people like understanding, you know, what, especially, like, you know ... I mean, I, I live with autism every day and it's definitely, it's an adventure, why-

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: Hence why I call that podcast (laughs) Adventures in Autism, 'cause we have many of those.

Philip D.: Well done. (Laughs).

Megan C.: Um, wonderful, oh thank you. Well, Adventures in Babysitting has always been one of my favorite movies too.

Philip D.: Okay.

Megan C.: So, ah, I borrowed from there just a little bit. Um, but, yeah, it's, it's definitely, um, it's wonderful to, to, to have a voice and, and to use it. Um, my son, he, he is, for all intents and purposes he is non-verbal. He does have words, and they are growing by the day and he is becoming more consistent with using them, but he is not at all, like, conversational at this point.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: So, um, we're working on it and we're, we're getting there, we do all kinds of therapy. But again, I mean I, I really am his voice and I, I want to make him as proud as he makes me.

Philip D.: I, I-

Megan C.: And I [inaudible 00:28:03].

Philip D.: I think you are absolutely going that and, and-

Megan C.: Thank you.

Philip D.: I, I ... Yeah. I think he is lucky to have-

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: And I think this is often the case. So, ah, there are many, many autism moms out there, um, that I've met and I just often think, man, it ... These, these children, these sons, these daughters, are very, very lucky to have these strong women. And, and autism dads frankly.

Megan C.: [inaudible 00:28:32].

Philip D.: I've, I've met many amazing autism dads-

Megan C.: Yeah.



Philip D.: ... out there, ah, so these parents, um, they are lucky to have these parents that are, that are willing to, to fight and scrap and, and make sure that they have the best life possible and the most opportunities possible. Um-

Megan C.: Yeah, that's exactly it. I mean, it's really just figuring out, you know, the, the best path for, for your child.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: And it, and it is gonna look different for everyone. I remember, like, when, when Logan first had gotten diagnosed and I was just doing, like, all kinds of research and, you know, staying up late and trying to figure things out, I came across the idea of, like, like an assisted-living type of facility.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: And, you know, for like adults on the spectrum. And at first I was like, "Oh my God, I would never send my kid to ... " Like, "I, I'm, he's, I'm ... He's gonna be with me, like, I'm gonna take care of him." But then as time went on and I've started to understand more and look at the, the big picture more, I'm like, "You know what? Like, he might be happier living with that, that, that freedom of ... " you know, still, still having the guidance and still having someone there to watch over him. But, you know, if ... I, I, I hope and pray that he gets to the point where he is able to, to have that, that freedom and that, have enough, like, self-care and have enough communication skills that he would be able to get to that point.

Megan C.: But it's like when you are, when, when you're early in the diagnosis or just early in the process of things, like, you, you hear stuff like that and you're like, "Well, I could never do that." But then as time goes on and you see things differently it, it makes you realize, you know, it's, it's so ... It's great that there, there are those options out there. Because as someone recently described it to me, like, she's like, "It's kind of like a college dorm," and I was like, "Oh, oh like, that might be like really fun for him." (Laughter). Now that I think of it.

Philip D.: Yeah, get away from mom and dad for a minute, God.

Megan C.: Yeah, exactly. 'Cause, I mean, he probably is gonna sick of me, I mean ... (Laughter). You know, I would keep him with me my whole life but ... Yeah, it's, it's just, it's interesting as time goes on how your, your perspective shifts and changes, you know, just with, ah, with, with time but also like with understanding and me educating myself as well, ah, 'cause that's been a, a huge, a huge piece of this puzzle too for sure.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Megan C.: 'Cause kind of like you, I really, I mean, I knew what autism was but it was like, I mean, I had, I had no idea. (Laughter).

Philip D.: Yeah, well I mean-

Megan C.: What I-

Philip D.: ... until, until you're living it, and, and I can't say-

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: ... that I have ever lived it in that way, I've been in a classroom but nobody went home with me.

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: Ah, I ... You know, I think then that's a whole other understanding.

Megan C.: Yeah. That's amazing though. That was something I wanted to ask you.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: Um, so you don't have, like, any family members that have autism? Like, what drew you to this?

Philip D.: Ah, no I, I don't. Um, I, ah, I ... What drew me was, was that, that classroom. I was, um, in-, incredibly grateful to be surrounded by, ah, amazing educators. Um, shout-out Katherine, Rachel, Stephanie and Brian, ah, who are the, the teachers in that classroom, um, who kind of eased me into the world, ah, but like allowed me to co-, connect with the students. Um, the, the, the sort of, the icing on the cake was there was one student, um, who liked to do art projects. Um, and by that I mean she would rip up tiny pieces of construction paper and paste them to larger pieces of construction paper, um, and generally do landscapes.

Megan C.: Wow.

Philip D.: Um, and this young woman, ah, could barely write her name, um, and maybe had 20 words that they, they used regularly. Um, but she could do this. And the one day she did, um, the Lorax Forest.

Megan C.: Oh wow.

Philip D.: She had seen The Lorax over the, the weekend with her sister and she did that. And I watched her do it and, um, the key was getting the art project away from her before - I always said she'd become a frustrated artist and she would just straight-up destroy it. (Laughter). Ah, sometimes eat it, ah, but, you know just-

Megan C.: That happens.



Philip D.: Yeah, just destroy it. Ah, and so I did, I took it from her as she finished it and then we spent the next three weeks getting her to sign it. Um, and that, that's in my apartment right now.

Megan C.: Oh, yeah.

Philip D.: It's framed in my apartment. Um, and that moment I was, ah, you know, I don't know, I don't know how to explain that other than there was this connection with this community that I just thought, you know, I'm here now. Ah, this is a community I want to work for, I want to work with. Um, the parents, the educators, the caregivers, had such compassion and empathy, um, that I didn't see everywhere else, even in the arts as a whole.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um, so that's when I started looking to kind of connect the two. I knew I didn't wanna teach. Ah, teaching was not meant for me. (Laughter). Ah, um, but I was also to sort of meld the two over the period of time in, in furthering my education a little bit. Um, ah, and then ended up landing at TDF and now, ah, consulting independently and at Kaiser's Room. But they, the, that ... The community to me is incredibly unique.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Even, even in the world of disability. I think, you know, the disability community as a whole is a very passionate, um, community, but I, in the world of cognitive and developmental disability and autism, um, it's, it's different. There's just something different. And it is, and it is a community that I just was, I, I just connected with. Um-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Ah, I, I don't, I don't, and, you know, I don't know why (laughs). Ah, but I am, I'm happy that I did and it really, it gave me a lot of, ah, purpose I think-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... um, in life, that I was missing at that time. Um, but it, you know-

Megan C.: That's incredible. I mean, especially, you know, as, as an autism mom, I mean, you, you pray that people are going to come into your child's life, people like you that really take a, a real interest and just have that, have that empathy and that respect, you know, for, for your child. Because again, my, my son's young but I mean, I don't care how old your kid is, they're still your baby (laughs).

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: So-

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Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: That's just, that's just the way it is. Um, and we've been very blessed to have some really wonderful people, ah, on this journey helping us and ... But there are, there are some that are just like, that stand out a little more than others because it's like, kind of like you're saying. If you, if you are touched by somebody with autism they will, they will work their way into your heart in a way that nobody else can. And I know I'm his mom (laughter) in saying this, you know, a little bit biased, but I mean, I ... Like, again, when Logan first got diagnosed it was really hard. It was me and his, his dad, my husband.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: You know, we were, we were very sad. We felt like really devastated. And I feel so differently about it now that I hate to even use those words, but just in our honesty that was, that was how we felt. Um, again we just didn't really know what we were dealing ... But, um, at the time yeah, we, we felt ... We were like, you know, "What, ah, what is his life gonna be like and what's our life gonna be like?" and there were just so many, there were so many questions.

Megan C.: Um, but when you can find people along the way that are in your corner and they, they rally for you, it just, it, it helps so much. But then also the other side of it is that, you know, now time has gone on we've been able to accept things obviously and I, I just know that Logan was meant to be mine and ... I mean, I really do feel like advocacy is, like, gonna turn into my life's work. (Laughs).

Megan C.: Which I never would have imagined that, like, you know, (laughs), before I had kids. And I ... But, but that's strongly I feel about it because ... I mean, obviously again I'm his mom so I'm advocating for my son. Um, but I'm so thankful for people like you who are advocating, you know, not even ... It's like you said, it's not even like they're somebody who you're super-close to but you just, like, see this community and see, see all the amazing wonderfulness that there is. Um, and I'm, I'm just so, so appreciative of that.

Megan C.: But also I, I understand, I hear what you're saying too though, 'cause it so different because, I mean, autism is still like such a mystery. Like, there are still so many questions and there are so many things that we don't, we don't know and there's so much to learn still. Um, it's, and it is, it's really interesting to kind of dive into all that.

Philip D.: Yeah. I think in, in the world of, ah, like making decisions still based in the unknown and like-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... you know, deciding on different therapies and, and things like that, like, we're dealing with a much shorter period of time of research-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... than, than most other disabilities, not all disabilities but most others.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um, so it, it, to me it's, it's, it's fascinating and there's just a tremendous a-, amount of leaps of faith-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... that have to happen, um, at times for things even like ABA to exist. Like, a certain amount of people had to be like, "I'm gonna give that a shot."

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Ah, for, for it to work and it ju-

Megan C.: We love ABA, we do all, all sorts of ABA here so ... (Laughter).

Philip D.: My-

Megan C.: But I have to-

Philip D.: My very good friend, ah, [Beck Urai 00:38:54] who-

Megan C.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... who is a listener on the podcast and, ah, is wonderful, is, ah, a BCBA-

Megan C.: Oh.

Philip D.: ... so she'll be happy to hear that. (Laughs).

Megan C.: You go girl, we love you.

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: Yeah, no, we were ... And I was scared, I was scared because I knew that that was what they were gonna recommend for Logan, but I also knew that ABA was, like, so intensive, like, with your time. Um, and, and that really scared me because I'm like, "Oh my gosh, like someone ... " 'Cause we do in-home ABA, I'm like, "Someone's gonna be in my house, like, how many hours a week?"

Megan C.: But, I mean, since Logan has started ABA, which has been like a little over a year now, the, the progress that he's made has been just stunning. Um, and we've been really lucky to have a wonderful BCBA and, and a therapist that, that come to us and they are, again, like so, so loving and caring. I ... It's funny because, you know, I'm, I'm just like the



autism mom, but as I have dove into this, this world a little bit more, I'm learning so many things about the autism community. And especially people who themselves have autism. And, like, sometimes I guess ABA, like, isn't always looked at (laughs) as like the best thing. Um-

Philip D.: Well, it's not for everyone.

Megan C.: Right.

Philip D.: I think it's like ... A-, and it goes back to, to me, um, applying principles that we accept in the world of individuals who identify as neuro-typical-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... to individuals who identify as atypical. Ah, because in the world of neuro-typical we have visual learners, we have auditory learners, you know, we have all different kinds of learners, and, and accept that. Or we should be accepting it. Lots of places accept that and, and try to teach in that way. But in the world of autism, um, I think at one point we were like, "Oh, okay, ABA, that works. Great, done."

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Ah, but it doesn't work for everyone.

Megan C.: Right.

Philip D.: Nor should it, because there's gonna be different kinds of learners in that community in the same way there is in other communities. So, you know, you have the Sunrise program and a variety of other programs and-

Megan C.: Yes.

Philip D.: ... more occupational therapy-based programs. And, you know, all, all of these things that are, are different. Um, and it gets back to that individualized approach.

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: You know, we, we just can't paint with, you know, one color here.

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um-

Megan C.: That's true.

Philip D.: Yeah. It, it's, it's a, it's called a spectrum for a reason. (Laughs). Like-

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Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: I-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: And I go back to that often, I'm like, "It's, there's a reason it's called autism spectrum," like-

Megan C.: Yes, it's so true. Just like the fundamental of it. Yeah, I mean, it, it really interesting though to see just, like, what, what people think about, um, you know, the different ... 'Cause like I said, I, before, before I was in this world I didn't know a lot about it and I'm still learning a ton about it. Um, and you, you talked about it on ... I can't remember what episode it was but you had, um ... He, he has autism and he's an actor.

Philip D.: Oh, Andrew Duff, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Megan C.: Yes. Oh my gosh, I loved that episode.

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: I was like a sponge listening to that. I thought he was incredible. So shout-out to you Andrew, if you're listening, you rock. Um, but he talked about, you guys were talking about Autism Speaks and-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... how like, again, like, there's, there's a lot of people that really hate Autism Speaks and it's like I ... I mean, I know, I knew that before you guys talked about it, um, but I remember finding that out for the first time, thinking, "Wait a minute, what? Like, I didn't know that ... " Like, there, there are so ... Ah, everyone kind of views things differently.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: Um, so that, that's been really interesting to me too, just like learning what the autism community thinks about all these different, like, kind of practices and like what, what's accepted and what's not and, like, what's maybe, you know, not, not so popular. Um, that's been, that's been really interesting to me. But I, like, for me, um, I think that ...

Megan C.: Like, kind of like how you're saying it's different for everybody and I feel like, you know, as like a mom with, like, a non-verbal child, I think Autism Speaks does a lot of good 'cause they're, they're doing a lot of research and they're, you know, again just spreading that, the, the awareness.



Megan C.: But at the same time, I completely see where people are coming from where they maybe are, have a more negative viewpoint on-

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: ... on Autism Speaks. So, it's just really interesting.

Philip D.: Yeah, it, it really is. And, and it's a ... You know, I think as it's such a large community, you're going always going to get diverse, ah, viewpoints 'cause we're now at, um ... What was the new statistic? One in 58, 59?

Megan C.: I wanna say it was 48. I think it's been like-

Philip D.: 48? Yeah, okay.

Megan C.: It's pretty-

Philip D.: I thought ... That was my instinct and I was like, "Ooh, is it that high?"

Megan C.: Yeah. I think it's 48. But then they, they say that it's probably even higher because there's kids, you know, who are on the spectrum and haven't been diagnosed yet.

Philip D.: Right. There is under-diagnosis in, ah, communities of color-

Megan C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... and, ah, women as well.

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: Which w-, ah, astronomical under-diagnosis, ah, in women.

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: Um, which was the, ah, topic of this year's UN summit on autism. Ah-

Megan C.: Oh.

Philip D.: Yeah. Ah, it was, it was very interesting to sit on listen. You know, I, ah ... You know, and talk about being unaware, once again, that's probably the-

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: ... most unaware I had been in a few years about topics when I walked in. And, and the rates of under-diagnosis or un-diagnosis, ah, for women on the spectrum and a lack of services provided, um, is, is astronomical, um, which is, ah, is unfortunate.

Megan C.: Yeah, for sure.

Philip D.: However, I am an optimist, ah, and so-

Megan C.: (Laughs).

Philip D.: ... ah, and so I would love to hear from you, ah, (laughter), ah, ah, I, I, you know ... In my old job, ah, I would, ah, yell out at times of, of, ah, tension, that I'm a beacon of optimism.

Megan C.: (Laughs)

Philip D.: Ah, and I will not be brought down. Ah, and so I'd love to hear from you a little bit about what you would hope for, um, and, and you can go as practical or big picture as you'd like, um, in, in the world of not only autism but advocacy and, and what you hope to provide for people through your podcast.

Megan C.: Yeah. Well, like you, I am an optimist. (Laughs). Um, I am definitely like glass half full. Um, just last week I did an episode about, it was a solo episode, it was just me, and I talked about the five biggest challenges that we've had. And even that alone was a challenge, because I don't like to talk about challenges, I like to talk about the positive (laughs). So ... But at the same time there are challenges and I wanted to be honest.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: Um, but, but basically just kind of what you're saying. I, I want to, to, to spread obviously the awareness, but I wanna spread just that positivity and just let people know that ... Like, again, most of what I am doing is working on that support piece. So, I, I absolutely want to be an advocate for my son and for everybody on the spectrum in the best way that I can and for me right now doing the podcast has been amazing because I've been able to connect with so many people like I was saying. And just being able to spread that positivity and give that support and make those connections, I think is, is so important. I mean big picture like let's take over the world, I don't know. (Laughter).

Philip D.: I'm fine with that.

Megan C.: I like to think, you know, like go big or go home. Um, I would, I would just like to see ... I mean, [inaudible 00:46:45], like I was saying, like sort of the, the direction that we're heading in I think is a good one. I, I talk about this in my podcast too, but like, I love that there are shows like Atypical and The Good Doctor.

Megan C.: Even though they're not, like, representing all of autism and they're just a very, again, one person so it's a very small piece, it's still like getting that out there. It's making it a more, like, common conversation that people can talk about because they're watching this show and they like the show. And it's just, like, that to me is, is at the very least, like, raising that awareness and starting the conversation and I love that.

Megan C.: So I would, I would love to see things just continue moving in that direction. Um, and yeah, as for me, I definitely, I just wanna keep, keep on trucking with the podcast and spreading, spreading that love and positivity. And just giving, giving people that support because, like I said, that was something that I felt like I was really lacking, especially in the early days, and just making those connections because ... Yeah. And, and if you ... I have a lot of, you know, other friends who have kids the same age and it, it kind of is like talking apples and oranges when you're talking about (laughs), you know, neuro-typical kids.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Megan C.: That is again on the spectrum. So, just having, having that, you know, like common ground with another autism parent has been wonderful for me, um, and I, I think everyone likes it (laughter) who's been listening.

Philip D.: Hey-

Megan C.: So, yeah, just keep on going. I, I have had, like, I had an OT on and, um, I would love to talk to more, like, experts in the field, just because I think everyone does have such a different perspective of autism. Um, 'cause like you said too, like, I mean, you, it, it's not like you have a, a kid autism, but it's like you work with people with autism so you totally have a different perspective than, than I would or, you know, my husband would.

Megan C.: I'm interviewing somebody, um, next week who, she has, like, an older adult sibling with autism. It's her sister.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: Um, which I think is so interesting just to hear, hear that perspective because, like, I mean, I have, I have two, two little girls who, you know, they're gonna grow up with a brother with autism and I'm curious to see what's that like for people. Because I only know what it's like for me as his mom.

Philip D.: Right.

Megan C.: So yeah, just hearing, hearing all these different voices, getting their perspective, and, um, just being, being a voice in the community.

Philip D.: I think that's fantastic. Ah-

Megan C.: Yeah. (Laughs).

Philip D.: And in an effort to, ah, continue taking over the world-

Megan C.: (Laughs).



Philip D.: ... ah, and spreading love a little bit, is there anyone out there or any organizations you'd like to give a little bit of ...

Megan C.: Yes, I definitely would. So, um, the first one I'm gonna say is, ah, it's the Autism Hero Project which is, ah, like a local organization here in Chicago. I actually had the president on my podcast a couple of weeks back, ah, Tameka, and she, they're having a, a fundraiser, their first fundraiser this week so I can't go, or I, I can't wait to go and to meet everybody there. But they're amazing. They actually purchase medical insurance for families with kids on the spectrum so that they're able to, to get ABA and to get the services that they-

Philip D.: Amazing.

Megan C.: Yes. So, they're phenomenal. Um, and then I also interviewed, um, a woman named Nicole and she has a not-for-profit called Soothing-, The Soothing Stitches Project and she makes weighted blankets for kids on the spectrum and ... Or really anybody, adults, anyone who wa-, needs a blanket. But she makes them, like, she'll ... If somebody orders one then the money that it takes makes, to make one, will make it for the, someone who can't afford one. I'm ex-, explaining this horribly. (Laughter). I'm saying this so badly. Basically, she provides blankets to kids who could not afford them.

Philip D.: Okay. (Laughs).

Megan C.: And she also has ... She makes them for everyone but she doesn't take any profit for them.

Philip D.: Gotcha.

Megan C.: All, like, the materials that are covered ... I'm, I'm really sorry Nicole, if you're listening. (Laughter). I explained that so horribly. She's on my podcast and she explains it wonderfully, so just listen to that. Um, but yeah she, she is amazing. Um, ah, I think that's, I think that's it for now but I mean, yeah, anyone who's like fighting the good fight, I'm with you.

Philip D.: That's fantastic. Ah ... (Laughter). Well, ah, thank you again for, ah, taking the time to join us. Ah, thank you for all the work you're doing, thank you for your podcast, thank you for being an amazing mum, ah-

Megan C.: Aw.

Philip D.: ... and thank you for being an Access Champion.

Megan C.: Thank you. And I have to say one more thing.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan C.: Your theme song just, like, gets me going.

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: I wanna like [inaudible 00:51:33] and like run a marathon and I don't run but like-

Philip D.: (Laughs).

Megan C.: ... it's just like so inspiring. So yes, thank you for saying that I'm an Access Champion because I feel like I am worthy of that theme song now. (Laughter).

Philip D.: You hear that, Eric Walden? Your theme gets her running.

Megan C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: There you go buddy.

Megan C.: (Laughs). Thank you so much for having me.

Philip D.: Thanks again to Megan for taking the time to, to chat with us. Um, ah, if you, if you get a chance, guys, check out her podcast Adventures in Autism, um, it's really great. I, I just, ah ... Before, before speaking to her and then after speaking to her I, I, I've listened to all the episodes. Um, they're really wonderful, um, and give a, a really, ah, unique perspective. Um, even if you aren't necessarily in the world of autism or cognitive and developmental disability, um, I think there, there's something there for you. Um, I think learning a little bit about that community, um, is really, really interesting. So, ah, please check it out again, it's Adventures in Autism.

Philip D.: Um, wanna take a quick second thank our producer, Matt Kerstetter, for making us sound great each and every week, our Champion intern, Miss Kelsey Brown, who does tremendous work. Um, ah, the work of them have combined for most of our guests (laughs) on this show so, ah, ah, really grateful to them. And of course thank you to Eric Walden, who got a shout-out on this episode, ah, for his theme song which I love listening to each and every single week.

Philip D.: Um, and we will be back again next week, inclusion believers, and remember, never stop running through that brick wall.