

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.

Philip D.: Uh, we have another great episode for you this week. Um, uh, from our pop-up studio in Atlanta this past summer at the Kennedy Center, uh, LEAD Conference. Uh, accepting proposals and, uh, next summer in Denver. Um, so, uh, we'll, we'll have a link, uh, with this episode. If you're, you're interested and you have something to share, um, all of our, our previous guests this year had, had amazing experiences, and I encourage you all to, to look at, uh, proposing for this conference and, and obviously other conferences as well. Um, but, I just got the email the other day that their, their, uh, proposals are open. And, uh, the podcast, uh, absolutely intends on being there again this year out in Denver. So, very excited about that.

Philip D.: Um, this week's guest, uh, from our pop-up studio is Robert Carr, uh, who is the Director of Programs and Service Coordinator, uh, for the New Jersey Theater Alliance. Um, it was really great to, to chat with him. Uh, he's someone that I've known, sort of, second-hand for many years, um, through one of our previous guests. Um, and always admired his work, um, you know, fellow Jersey boy. Uh, and, uh, you know, he's, he's doing great work in my home state and, uh, you know, I'm always appreciative of that and, uh, a big fan, a big fan of the Access in Jersey. Um, but it was great to sit down with him and, actually, hear his journey and get to know him a little bit, um, beyond just what I had heard from, from other people, which was all, you know, glowing, glowing reviews, um, of him as a human. (laughs) Uh, not just as a ... Um, hopefully you'll enjoy it.

Philip D.: Uh, and, um, I just want to, again, throw it out there, uh, if you aren't already, please, uh, do go ahead and follow us on social media. Um, our Champion intern, uh, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown, uh, is constantly putting out great content. Um, not just from the episodes, but shows, quotes, videos, et etcetera, um, that I, I think are fascinating in, in the world of, uh, accessibility, inclusion, and diversity.

Philip D.: Um, so, uh, on Twitter and Instagram, we're at Access Champion. And on Facebook, the Access Champion podcast. Um, and then, uh, for ... you know, I, I hate to give too many action items out there. But, um, for those of you out there, uh, who already like us, I, I'd love for you guys to, to share, share the podcast and, um, you know, Facebook makes it really easy to invite all your friends. (laughs) Uh, so if you, you want to, if you want to go ahead and do that, or leave us a review, uh, we ... you know, some of our, uh, previous guests and long-time listeners have left us reviews. And it's always really great, um, to hear what you enjoy, uh, about the podcast.

Philip D.: Um, and as always, if there is something you want to talk about, if there is, uh, something you want to bring to our attention, um, please feel free to email us [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com), uh, and we're pretty quick to respond, so. Um, I think that's all of our business today. So, without further ado, Access Champion, Robert Carr.

Philip D.: All right, and we are back in our pop-up studio here at the Kennedy Center LEAD Conference, uh, in Atlanta. And I am joined by Robert Carr, uh, from the New Jersey Theater Alliance. And I'm gonna let him give you ...

Robert C.: (Laughs)

Philip D.: ... his title.

Robert C.: Director of Programs and Services, and ADA Coordinator.

Philip D.: It's a hefty title.

Robert C.: (Laughs)

Philip D.: Uh, you guys may remember, uh, his name from ... I believe it was our third or fourth episode with Christina Trivigno um, uh, who is a big fan of your work.

Robert C.: Oh, I'm a big fan of hers too.

Philip D.: (Laughs) Um, how many LEAD Conferences is this for you?

Robert C.: This is my ... oh boy. I've been coming since 2005, so, ...

Philip D.: All right.

Robert C.: ... that's a long time.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Robert C.: Yeah. 13 years. But I missed two in the interim.

Philip D.: Okay.

Robert C.: So this is about, uh, ...

Philip D.: Yeah.

Robert C.: ... the 11th or 12th. Something like that.

Philip D.: A little over a bunch. (laughs)

Robert C.: A bunch. A lot.

Philip D.: Technical term. Been usin' a lot of technical terms this week. (laughs)

Robert C.: (Laughs) Right.

Philip D.: Uh, you know, one of the things I love to hear, is what brought you to accessibility? Like what was your journey?

Robert C.: Oh boy.

Philip D.: Um, because, uh, one of my favorite things, uh, especially at the conferences hearing how people ended up ...

Robert C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... in the field, ...

Robert C.: Sure.

Philip D.: ... because no one story is the same.

Robert C.: Right.

Philip D.: Everyone, kind of, has a, a unique journey, um, to, to that. So, how did you end up in, in that, in that room?

Robert C.: Oh boy. Um, well, I had been working within the New Jersey Theater Alliance community for a, for a while.

Philip D.: Hm.

Robert C.: Um, 20, 25 year veteran of that, at least at this point. My goodness. Um, and I had been working, uh, at one of our member theaters and this opportunity came up at the Theater Alliance. Uh, and I went and interviewed, interviewed with, uh, with John McEwen, who is the executive director, um, who is, uh, also, a long-time advocate for accessibility with his work, uh, the Paper Mill Playhouse, and now with the Theater Alliance, the State Arts Council, and Cultural Access Network Project. Um, and, you know, in the interview process he mentioned that, you know, accessibility is a cornerstone of the New Jersey Theater Alliance. And, um, you know, is, is this work that you feel comfortable doing? And, you know, I have a performance background and, ...

Philip D.: (Laughs)

Robert C.: ... you s-, you, you ... your, your actor instincts kick in, and I'm like, yeah, sure, I can do that. Yes. Um, but I, you know, I was sensitive to it, uh, because my, uh, my mother had, had a, um, an, a, an illness. So I was sensitive to that. I was, I was sensitive to, um, you know, the needs of, uh, people with disabilities. And, you know, I, I would like to consider myself a, you know, a, a, a sensitive person and, and ... So it, it wasn't, it wasn't a huge leap. And, and, you know, as, as I learned, um, and what was very fortunate for me is, you know, we are surrounded by a number of amazing, uh, advocates in New Jersey. So I was stepping into a dynamic that was already pretty potent.

Philip D.: Hm.

Robert C.: Um, so all I ... Honestly, to be completely, absolutely honest with you. At, at the beginning, all I had to do was sit back and absorb, and watch, and observe, and take it all in, because, um, what the ... you know, the work that's being done in New Jersey is,

is, is pretty astounding. Um, and it, it was, it was a lot to live up to and I just had, I had wonderful examples.

Philip D.: Well I, I, I think that's a fantastic thing to step into. The ability to, uh, absorb, as you say, um, quality work and then to know that the bar is high.

Robert C.: Very.

Philip D.: So, you know, there's that motivation to beyond being ... like, well it's good, you know. It's good.

Robert C.: Yeah, yeah.

Philip D.: Well, no, if the bar is great. Gre-, the great bar, I feel like ...

Robert C.: Right.

Philip D.: The good bar oftenly, often, uh, stays the same, ...

Robert C.: Right, right.

Philip D.: ... I feel like in, in, in fields. The great bar moves higher, and higher, ...

Robert C.: Yes it does.

Philip D.: ... and higher.

Robert C.: Yes it does.

Philip D.: Uh, so it's one that you're always tryin' to meet.

Robert C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: Uh, so what a, what a great, sort of, entryway into the field I feel like where you have these resources to, to fall back on and ...

Robert C.: Absolutely.

Philip D.: ... to learn from. But, you know that you want to build on it.

Robert C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um, so, that's fantastic. Can you tell me a little bit about, uh, what you guys have going on at the New Jersey Theater Alliance?

Robert C.: Oh boy. Um, we are in the midst of, uh, a number of, uh, initiatives right now. Uh, we just did our, you know, [3-D 00:08:06] year strategic plan and, ...

Philip D.: (Laughs)

Robert C.: ... you know. Uh, looking at the future. Looking at, um, ways to adapt. Making sure that we're, we're nimble. Um, we're in a ... we're, right now, um, working on a technological survey of the field, ...

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert C.: ... to find out what the capacity is technologically. Um, and, uh, including accessibility in that. Um, you know, 'cause the, the cultural access network is a project of the Theater Alliance with the State Arts Council.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert C.: Uh, but it's not, you know, the, the full work we do. It is a cornerstone program. Um, but we are, um, we are in the midst of a lot of, a lot of inf- ... most ... a little too much, too ma-, too much to, to n- ... too numerous to mention, let's say. (laughs)

Philip D.: Fair enough.

Robert C.: Yeah. (laughs)

Philip D.: Well, and that's a, um, again, also, a nice place to be.

Robert C.: Yeah, yeah.

Philip D.: You, you get your hands all over the place and, ...

Robert C.: We are.

Philip D.: ... uh ... As a Jersey boy myself, I ...

Robert C.: All right.

Philip D.: (Laughs)

Robert C.: Jersey pride.

Philip D.: Exit 5, uh, shout out. (laughs)

Robert C.: (Laughs) Exit 14. (laughs)

Philip D.: Right. Very different kinds of New Jersey.

Robert C.: Yes.

Philip D.: Um, I, uh, I love hearing that. I love, uh, knowing, sort of, the reach that you guys have ...

Robert C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... across the state.

Robert C.: Sure.

Philip D.: Um, ...

Robert C.: Sure.

Philip D.: ... yeah. I find, often, in, um, other states, these, kind of, resources, or these kinds of organizations live in a hub.

Robert C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Maybe in the major city.

Robert C.: Sure.

Philip D.: They don't, necessarily, have the reach to the, to the other parts of the state.

Robert C.: Right, right, right.

Philip D.: Um ...

Robert C.: We are one of a, of, I think, two or three state-wide arts agencies, ...

Philip D.: Yeah.

Robert C.: ... arts agencies. You know, and, and just due to what you were just saying is, is a lot of our other sister organizations, um, sort of, manage and oversee large metropolitan areas. Boston, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, you know, that kind of a thing. Um, and our ... New Jersey's size, um, is an advantage for us in that, you know, s- ... in, in, in that, you know, the gr- .... One of the great things about New Jersey is within 90 minutes you can be at the beach or you can be in the mountains.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert C.: You know, really, depending on where ... any, anywhere you are. Um, you know, so we have, um, 35, uh, member theaters in the New Jersey Theater Alliance, all the way down from Cape May to all the way to Hudson, from Camden to, uh, across to Mercer, you know. So, we're, we're all over the place. Um, and each of our member theaters, you know, is its only little ... is in its own little metropolitan area, uh, you know, if you will. So, we are managing, you know, sort of, 35 regions if you really think about it, you know. Helping assist I should say.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert C.: Um, uh, 35 little regional areas, which is, which is, really, kind of, amazing.

Philip D.: Yeah. (laughs)

Robert C.: (Laughs)

Philip D.: Yes, yes it is.

Robert C.: Yeah. (laughs)

Philip D.: Um, so we are at the LEAD Conference.

Robert C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: Um, you are (laughs) a veteran of the LEAD Conference.

Robert C.: Yup.

Philip D.: Um, every year I always find that, at least, uh, definitely, by today we are on the last day of the LEAD Conference when ...

Robert C.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: ... we are recording this. Um, there's something that stuck with me. There's, there's an idea or something.

Robert C.: Right.

Philip D.: Um, after the session, what, what ... this year what, what, what was ... what [crosstalk 00:11:13]

Robert C.: Somebody, somebody said something yesterday that, that really, kind of, struck with me that I'm gonna take home. They said ... it, it was about the access work that, uh, organizations provide, and accommodations that, uh, organizations provide. And it was a shift of getting an organization to understand, or getting them to think different ... think, think this way.

Robert C.: Let's manage the accommodations so it's something that we do with you, and not that we do for you. And that was, like, bwah, you know. It was, like ... because it's, it's this, this, uh, magnanimity, you know, that we're doing something for you. And aren't we so wonderful and fa- ... you know. How, how, uh, how, how gracious you should be to us that we're providing you this accommodation. And it's that, ew, that, that, kind of, mindset doesn't sit well with me. The, the sense that we're let's work together.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert C.: Let's work together with this. Where a lot of organizations trip up with accommodation, I've found is that they put the accommodation first and put the audience second. It should be the other way around.

Philip D.: Right.

Robert C.: You should work with your audience. Develop a relationship with this audience, um, to learn their likes, learn their dislikes, and the accommodation is the last thing that you put in place.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert C.: Because you're building that audience, you're building that trust to say, you know, we're gonna ... we want to work with you. We wanna work with you, we want to have you part of our audience. It's audience development at its core.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert C.: Um, so that's, really, where, um ... So, to hear that, you know, I, I've had this, sort of, feeling inside, but to hear that crystallized like that, was, was one of those just, like, land moments.

Philip D.: I heard ... I had a great ... Uh, I heard a great anecdote of that. Uh, there was a theater company, uh, in the northeast that dove all the way in. They were, like, we are gonna do ASL. The statistics say we have a hearing loss community of this number, ...

Robert C.: Right.

Philip D.: ... blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We're doing ASL. We add it to the schedule. Well, the fun thing about the hearing loss community is not everyone with hearing loss knows sign language.

Robert C.: Right, right, right.

Philip D.: And it turned out that their area didn't have many, if any, uh, that, uh, any person that identified as deaf culture.

Robert C.: Right, right.

Philip D.: And, so, they did ASL, and no one needed it.

Robert C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: Uh, so they ... and, and, luckily, they, they shifted towards, towards captioning. But it was because they, they had ... they skipped that step of the community partners.

Robert C.: Well that's what it is. And, and ... Like the difference between a, a sign interpreted performance, and an open caption performance is language. It's a, it's a culture language difference. It's like having something in Italian and then providing Spanish and saying, well that's close enough, you know? And that's not ... that's, that's not the truth of the, of the matter there.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Robert C.: You know.

Philip D.: No, that's really true. Well, um, thank you for sittin' down with us.

Robert C.: No, I'm happy to do it.

Philip D.: Um, and, uh, we're gonna have you on again soon, ...

Robert C.: I would love it.

Philip D.: ... um, because you are just across the river.

Robert C.: (Laughs) That's right. Very easy.

Philip D.: Uh, um, and uh, yeah.

Robert C.: Great.

Philip D.: Thanks man.

Robert C.: We'll see ya soon.

Philip D.: Thanks again to Robert for, uh, taking the time to chat with us at the pop-up studio. Uh, I hope ... man, what a, what blast that was having that pop-up studio. We're tryin' to, you know, tryin' to have that happen more often at different places, um, around here in New York, and, and, uh, frankly around the country.

Philip D.: So, uh, if there is somewhere where you'd love to have the podcast come and, and set up camp and, and, uh, chat with some folks, just, you know, again, shoot us a message across social media, or via email at [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). Um, and, and we'd love to come, you know, if we can make it, if we can make it happen. Um, we're pretty mobile in our equipment, and, and our, and our team. So, uh, you know, uh, please reach out to us and let us know.

Philip D.: Um, I want to say a quick thanks, again to, uh our producer, Matt Kerstetter, for, uh, pullin' this together over a holiday weekend, uh, and, and, and while traveling. Uh, you know, he is, he is a true Access Champion as well. Uh, thank you to our, uh, Champion intern, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown, um, for everything she does every single week, from social media to helping hunt down guests, and, and, and things of that nature. She's

really great. And, of course, thank you to Eric Walton for that dope theme song. Uh, it never gets old listening to it, so.

Philip D.: Uh, we'll be back again next week. And remember inclusion believers, never stop runnin' through that brick wall.