

Philip Dallmann: Hello, Inclusion Believers, and welcome to The Access Champion's podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dalmatian, for this week's journey into the galaxies of accessibility, diversity and inclusion.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, we have, uh, a g- great guest for you this week, coming to you all the way from Ghana. Uh, Farida Bedwei, uh, who, is... a tremendous, uh, software engineer, advocate, and comic book creator, uh, who happens to have cerebral palsy, uh, joins us to talk about her journey, um, into advocacy, um, at least, uh, i- initially, in the world of tech and sort of everyday living.

Philip Dallmann: Um, and now into the, uh, the first ever superhero with, uh, cerebral palsy, Karmzah, which is, uh, a new comic that's been, uh, is- is launching and it's fantastic. Um, and has been highlighted by CNN, BBC, what- a bunch of others, um, uh, and it's really, really tremendous and as many of you know I'm a huge comic book nerd. I... love me some superheroes and we did an episode a few months ago that really examined the fact that, um, there is a- a real lack of, uh, diversity when it comes to, uh, superheroes with disabilities, especially superheroes born with disabilities. Um, there are a few out there such as Professor X, or Daredevil, or Hawkeye, uh, who have disabilities, but they're from, uh, different accidents or things like that. Um, but, uh, superheroes born with disabilities, uh, are few and far between.

Philip Dallmann: Um, so what a- what a tremendous, uh, gap when you look at our overall population, uh, that, uh, has a disability or identifies as having a disability and, uh, the just lack of representation when it comes to superheroes. So, uh, Farida, uh, well on her way to helping fill this gap and- and fix this. Um, and... I- I- I, you know, if you couldn't tell I couldn't be more excited about it. Um, so really excited to share that conversation with you guys, uh, and it'll be just a moment.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, wanted to let you all know, uh, I did follow through on my proclamation from last week's episode, uh, performing in Aaron Gold's You Are Not Alone at the Magnet Theater, uh, it was such a unique, uh, experience. It was cathartic. Um, I, uh, was an essayist. I- I read an essay about my journey with depression, um, and it was probably, uh, the- the most vulnerable I've been in a- a-... in front of like 30, 40 strangers or so. Um, and then watched, uh, I think it was about eight improv- eight or nine improv artists create improvisation based on, uh, imagery and things in there and, uh, create like really tremendous comedy um and - and- and- bring a smile to your face after- after sharing something so deeply, deeply personal. Um, so, all that is to say, I know you are not alone.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, I- it's in different spots across the country, Aaron has continued to spread it, um, it, uh, it's a tremendous show. I- if you are in New York, um, it- I believe it's monthly at the Magnet, um, check it out. I can't recommend it more and- and- and to learn- A- Aaron does a much better job of describing the show, and it's- it's creation, so, um, we will-, in this episode, link to, uh, that old episode, um, from a few months ago, um, with Aaron, so...



Philip Dallmann: Uh, that being said, of course, as always, if you get a chance, please follow us on social media, give us a like, give us a follow, uh, we are at Access Champion and The Access Champion Podcast across all, uh, social media. If you have something you want to talk about, you have some thoughts, anything, want to just say hi, say what's up, uh, feel free to reach out, uh, access champion at gmail dot com. We don't bite, um, in fact, uh, we- we just love talking to people, uh, as always, we're- we're, um, always looking for new folks, new topics, new things to- to chat about, discuss, break apart, dig- dig into. Uh, alright! And, uh, now without further ado access champion, Farida Bedwei!

Philip Dallmann: Alright! And we are here with Farida Bedwei, uh, a, uh, a champion in many regards, uh, thank you for joining us!

Farida Bedwei: Oh! You are welcome. I- it's my pleasure. My pleasure.

Philip Dallmann: So, uh, Farida, I'd love to hear from you a little bit, uh, about your journey, uh, into, uh, the entire world of accessibility and inclusion, um, all the way leading up to, uh, to Karmzah.

Farida Bedwei: Well I have cerebral palsy, and I- I've had it my whole life, so I have always tried to champion th- the rights of people with disability in my country, Ghana. Um, basically, mm, we- we are very behind when it comes to accessibility, as well as the rights for people with disabilities. Most of- of the buildings are not- are not accessible, so it's very difficult to live here with a disability, but over the past 10 years, things have- a- are gradually changing-

Philip Dallmann: Mm- hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: -not at the pace as at- at- at- at- at which I wish it were, but you can see that- that the conversation is being had- had- had about it. The new buildings that are coming now have, uh, h- most of them have- have ramps. All those, some- some of the ramps, are- are very steep which- which is another conversation we- we should have to have about that, (sneeze) but- but I mean, so - so all those things are not ideal. At least we- we should- progress is being made. And what happened was, uh, how- how I got into this whole advocacy thing was because I wrote a book.

Philip Dallmann: Mm- hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: I wrote a book about- called 'The Definition of a Miracle', whi- which chronicles some of my life- life events which is as a child growing up with um cerebral palsy in Ghana. I fict- I fict- I fictionalized it, but I went through some of the fears that I wrote about in the in- in the book, and I had to promote the book, and anybody who knew me before then would- would- would be shocked because I was usually a very reserved person. I didn't like coming into the limelight or being a public figure or anything. But, when I had to promote the book, I had to



come on a few shows and people heard my story and- and- and they became so w- wild about it a- and all those things. And because of that I gradually found myself becoming an advocate for people with with- with various disabilities, and all that so that is how I got into the advocacy, um, field. Um, my profession, I am software engineer, a- and you know we are- we are not exactly the most sociable people, we just like to to be behind our computers-

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: and- and not talk to anybody

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: Or anything else. Just- just write our code and be left alone.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: But then be- because- because of this- of this- of this side of me I've had to come out of my shell a- and present the different person from what I really am.

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: But yeah. I am- I'm- I'm always looking for ways and means of making life easier for myself, as well as making life easier for other people with- with various disabilities.

Philip Dallmann: Now, uh, it was after that book, correct, that you, uh, were, uh, appointed to the, uh, Ghana's National Communication Authority, right?

Farida Bedwei: I was- I was- I was um I- I was appointed to the post for a couple of years, yes. It was one of my one- one of the things I have done. I have done a lot of things (laughs) and so, yeah

Philip Dallmann: (laughs) yes. Yes you have.

Farida Bedwei: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: Uh...

Farida Bedwei: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: That is- that is absolutely true. Uh, so, you know, it's- it is a little bit of a- a jump, uh, but how did you get from software engineer to comic book creator?

Farida Bedwei: Um, uh, uh, I- I- I'm- I- I'm also actually asking myself that question-



Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: (laughs) -everyday. I- I mean the other day I got- I got- I got an email from- from- from the British Council, and they wanted me to come and talk about- about Karmzah. And they - and in the email they wrote, as a comic book writer, and I'm like when did I become a comic book writer? I guess- I guess I have- I have to update my CV because I have never thought of myself as being that.

Farida Bedwei: But- but- but what happened was- was I met the- the the CEO of, um, of a digital comic studio and a- at a conference i- i- in Rwanda, this year, in August. August 2018, yeah.

Philip Dallmann: Okay.

Farida Bedwei: And we were both at the conference I mean- he's somebody who- who I have met- met bec- because- because the tech- the tech ecosystem in Ghana is really small, so everybody knows everybody

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: but I have never really sat down- sat down and h- had a- a conversation with him. But then we- we were both features at- at this conference so I sat in his session and you will hear- you will- he was talking about how to create, um, a- a comic character or cartoon or- or something and- and- and- and- as I was sitting there I was thinking that- so is- it's that easy to create a comic book? Okay. So let me- so- so after the- the- after the session I-I-I told him that, "Look I have an idea. About this- this superhero with- w- w- w- with cerebral palsy because, obviously, because... I mean growing up I loved m- m- my superheroes. I mean, in the eighties I- I had- I was a tomboy. I loved the Transformers, the, um, the He-man, She-ra all those-

Philip Dallmann: (laughs) Now you're speaking my language.

Farida Bedwei: all these superheroes. I love them [mumble 00:11:42]. Yeah. I mean... but I never had anybody who- who looked like me. Who had

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: uh my disability. Who I could relate to.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: And- and I recognize, I mean, cerebral palsy is- is said to be the number one cause of childhood disability worldwide. That 17- over 17 million people with that condition...



Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: Why- why aren't we represented in the book world or- or cartoon realm for that- for that matter. I mean, the children with- with- with-with cerebral palsy should be able to identify with a superhero. So I- so I had a conversation with him, and I told him that if- if he'll produce it, I'll- I'll write the script and he- he said, "Okay!"

Philip Dallmann: (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: So, then that is how.

Philip Dallmann: Well, that was easy! (laughs)

Farida Bedwei: Well, that is- yes! So that is how that Karmzah came- came -came to be I- I- I was just to promote inclusion so- so - so that, well I mean, I don't know I-I'm sure every- every person with a disability as a child ha- wished -wished that- that that their- their non-disabled co- peers or- or friends or whatever would- would play with them. I mean, we all went thr- though- through that stage, but- but- but for whatever reason maybe some- some of them didn't want to play with them. So I reckon that- that- that if-if the-there's a superhero who uses a- adaptive a- assistive- assistive devices and suddenly the assistive devices become cool so- s- so- so if- if- if there's a crutch or wheelchair or- or- or walker that- that can- can climb or hop or jump or something and- and children like- like watching those or- or reading about those- th-those characters, when they see a child with- with- with- with- u-u-using this- this crutch or wheelchair or walker they'll- they'll want to approach the child a- a- and first a-a friendship will be formed. So, that is w- the main reason why I am- I came up with Karmzah and honestly those [inaudible 00:14:07] have been marvelous I never dreamt that it will- it will be -reach the highs that it has reached, and the comic is-is still not- not- not even fully out!

Philip Dallmann: (laughs) That's amazing!

Farida Bedwei: Yeah!

Philip Dallmann: Yeah I-

Farida Bedwei: Yeah, it is! It is!

Philip Dallmann: I think it- it crossed, uh, my, uh, my feed when, uh, I think it was the BBC covered it?

Farida Bedwei: Yeah?

Philip Dallmann: Yeah. So, it's gotten tremendous press, uh, around the world. Um, and I-



Farida Bedwei: Yeah!

Philip Dallmann: And I- and I think you're right. I think you are, in such a tremendous way, filling, uh, such a need, you know? 17 million worldwide don't have a superhero they can identify with and that's unacceptable. Um, we talked about the... on the podc- on this podcast a few months ago about the lack of, um, superheroes with disabilities, uh, in general

Farida Bedwei: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, and uh...

Farida Bedwei: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: I... it's so great that you're- you're leading the way, uh, i- in helping correct that and fill that need for so many young people and- and grown people,

Farida Bedwei: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: as well. Uh, You know, I- I- I still-

Farida Bedwei: Yeah!

Philip Dallmann: I still love comics, and I still look to them, sometimes, for inspiration and I think, uh, I- I, you know, what a great opportunity for people. So, you know, I... with- with, uh, Karmzah on the way o- of- of, uh, launching and the work that you're doing, um, as an advocate, uh, what- what goals do you have for the future? What would you like to see in the future?

Farida Bedwei: I would- I would- I would love Karmzah to be turned into a movie or something so that- so that it- it will reach o-other pa- parts- parts of the world, as well a- as of those who- who cannot read for one reason or the other. I'd love to see it translated into various languages. I'd love to see it, um, in- in braille so that- so that the visually impaired can also read it. Uh, o- or even as an audio book for them.

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: I mean, I want it to go all over the world, I want- I want every child with- with whatever disability they have to feel that, that yes, they matter! And- and they can also be superheroes or superheroes in their own world because, I mean, Marvel has done- has done a good job but, I mean, they have a few- a few characters with disabilities, Professor X, um what- Daredevil and-and-and any other this thing. But, I don't think- think there are enough co-considering the number of people with various disabilities in- in the- in the world.



Philip Dallmann: Yeah,.

Farida Bedwei: So Karm- Karmzah...

Philip Dallmann: And- and none of those are- are born with their disability, either, uh, which I always find interesting. That- that's... yeah.

Farida Bedwei: Yeah

Philip Dallmann: All of them attained it later as a, you know, as a, uh, inciting action I guess.

Farida Bedwei: Yeah. Yeah, yeah... yeah. So, I mean, Karm- Karmzah is the first, but- but believe me in a year or two I'll probably introduce other- other characters w-w-with- with other disabilities into the comic so, uh, you say you can- you can definitely loo-loo-look hard for those. I'm looking for- for characters who are not- not usually represented for- in- in these- in some of this, um, realm. Li-like perhaps somebody with Down Syndrome or somebody who has - who has muscular dystrophy or something you know those- those- those disabilities that- that have not uh that- that- that are not, um, commonly represented

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: Yeah. So, that is- that may be the next step. But for the first- uh, but for twenty- nineteen it's just going to be Karmzah. B- but- but I'll definitely introduce other characters with other disabilities into the comic. So you can- can look out for that and forward to that, as well.

Philip Dallmann: Amazing. Uh, can't wait. Uh and then uh-

Farida Bedwei: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: You know I was (laughs) I, uh-

Farida Bedwei: (laughs)

Philip Dallmann: always like to wrap up a little bit with an opportunity to sort of spread the love? Are there- are there any people or organizations out there that you think are also doing, uh, really good work?

Farida Bedwei: Well, uh, the... if go to um.... I can't- I can't really pinpoint any b- but- because I mean obviously there are various there are various organizations focusing on various disabilities, I mean... you can't- you can't- you can't lump- lump- lump all the disabilities into one bowl because ev- every- everyone has their specialty, b- but in Ghana, in Ghana, I mean, Sure Care, which- which- which I am a part of, i- is doing a great job. We- we have a rehab center for children with disabilities,



um, we're in the, uh, really poor- poor area, so- so we basically treat them- treat them for free

Philip Dallmann: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Farida Bedwei: and we have seen a lot of- of improvement in some of- of the children over- over the year, so that is also doing well.

Farida Bedwei: Now that we have the Autism- Autism Awareness Center whi- which was set up b- by- by- by a very lovely woman called Serwah Quaynor who- who- who came to Ghana from- f- from the U.S. with her son about 20 years ago and there was no school or- or- or -or anything for children with autism. So, she decided to- to- to set one up herself. Right now, her son- her son is actually working and- and - basically fending for himself, more or less, so, yeah. And- and- and the- the school is still running and doing an- an amazing job for - for other children with autism, so, yeah.

Farida Bedwei: There-there are also a number of other ones who are doing different things but, as I said, it- it depends on- on the disability o- of all the wonderful person.

Philip Dallmann: Mm

Farida Bedwei: There's another organization called- called A Special Mother's Project. A Special Mother's Project is an organization o- of mothers a- and fathers of children with cerebral palsy who- who, once again, came together because- because th- they were not getting the support that- that- that they needed, so they decided to form a support group and support each toher.

Philip Dallmann: That's amazing

Farida Bedwei: So, yeah.

Philip Dallmann: That's great.

Farida Bedwei: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: Well, uh, thank you so much for, uh, joining us Farida and, uh, thank you so much for-

Farida Bedwei: Thank you for having me!

Philip Dallmann: Thank you f-

Farida Bedwei: As I've said- As I've told you earlier thi- thi- this is my ever podcast so I'm- I'm- I'm really happy to be on it! Yeah! (laughs)



Philip Dallmann: We're happy to have you and- and, uh, as- as someone who loves comic books and- and superheroes, but loves access-

Farida Bedwei: Yeah.

Philip Dallmann: and inclusion, thank you so much for, uh, creating Karmzah and- and continuing that work and continuing your advocacy. Uh, you are- you are truly an access champion.

Philip Dallmann: Thanks again to Farida for taking the time to- to join us and call us all the way from Ghana. Um, uh, d- I think that is now our longest distance call on the podcast setting, uh, a new record. Uh, I'll have to double check the mileage, uh, that... Mark was the previous winner. Um, just really- really grateful, uh, for all the work that, uh, she's doing and-and again, uh, for taking the time to join us. She's, uh, clearly done quite a few interviews, but happy to be her first podcast, um, I wonder how many peoples' first podcast we've been. I'll have to ask; We'll do a poll.

Philip Dallmann: Um, thank you as always to our producer, Matt Kerstetter, um, who, uh, makes this sound great each and every, single week without, uh, him this show does not happen. Um, uh, thank you to our amazing Champion Intern, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown. Thank you to Eric Walton for that dope theme song that is just wonderful.

Philip Dallmann: Uh, we'll be back again next week and remember, Inclusion Believers, never stop running... through that brick wall.

