

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. We've got another great episode for you guys this week, straight from our popup studio in Denver, from the Kennedy Center LEAD Conference.

Philip D.: It's a local voice from Denver. Nicole Cromartie, who's the director of education and programs at the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver, took some time to chat with us about some of the access and inclusion initiatives that she has helped launch, and some that already existed before she got there at Clyfford Still. She has a real interesting journey. I think she's the first person we've had on the podcast who was a former intern of another guest. She previously worked with Lucas Livingston over at the Art Institute in Chicago, and obviously Lucas was a tremendous guest, and the access happening over at the art Institute is really, really interesting and progressive in a lot of ways. So, exciting that she was able to come from there, see that and put her own stamp on the Access community in Denver. So really excited to share that conversation with you guys. It was just a blast.

Philip D.: I just want to take a couple of quick reminders out there that involve you guys staying in contact with me and our team here at Access Champions. One, we are in the midst of sorting out these ASL videos for the podcasts, which we're really, really excited about, but I'm a big believer in not just doing something, but making sure that we do it correctly. So we're slowly building out an advisory committee. So if you yourself consume the podcast via transcripts and would prefer it via ASL, or maybe you know someone who would enjoy the podcast, but maybe it hasn't been accessible because they don't necessarily enjoy transcripts and would prefer ASL, please reach out to us at [accesschampionatgmail.com](mailto:accesschampionatgmail.com). We really love your feedback, your ideas and just to have that conversation with you guys. Rumor has it, there's a Starbucks gift card involved for lending a hand. Again, that's [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). We want to get these ASL videos as correct as possible, as we pilot them. So thank you in advance, for any and all feedback at any and all suggestions of advisory committee members.

Philip D.: Speaking of advisory committees, we are always looking to expand our board. We are a New York state nonprofit. We have a board, they are not a traditional board. They are more of a steering committee that I reach out to and ask for advice. They share their expertise and resources and connections. There is no give or get fundraising goal or anything like that. It is more of a group of folks scattered across the world, who believe in access and inclusion and want to lend a hand in whatever way they can. If that is something that interests you and you want to have a further conversation about this, again, [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). Shoot us a little message and we'd be happy to chat with you about that.

Philip D.: Finally, the last part, connected to our email. As always, if there are topics or guests that you would like to see or hear or read on the on the podcast, please just reach out and let us know. We're constantly sending out press requests and trying to grab folks. But if there are folks that you know, that maybe we haven't had on yet, there's a chance that we don't know about the work they're doing. We try to stay in the loop about

everything that's happening, but it's a near impossible task to know all of the amazing work that's happening across the world. A great example, a year ago, Freda [inaudible 00:03:54] in Ghana, was an article sent to us that was on BBC. A listener over in London sent us that article and we were able to connect and reach out. It ended up being one of my favorite interviews and resulted in a couple of hundred listeners in Ghana. Shout out to our listeners in Ghana. Appreciate your ongoing support.

Philip D.: So again, if there is anyone or any topic that you would like to hear on the podcast, reach out, [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). We do love those conversations, so you may get an enthusiastic response.

Philip D.: As always, make sure you're following us on social media, @accesschampion on Twitter and Instagram and the Access Champion podcast on Facebook. We're pretty active. Quality over quantity, definitely. It's a great way to catch bits of the episodes if you're not able to listen that week, we always put out a little clips. We share the amazing episode images that Miss Kelsey Rose Brown does for us every week. And we share quotes, topics, articles, et cetera, across the board. So really, really great stuff. And we're thankful for the work that Kelsey and our Champion intern Savannah Cooper do in that realm.

Philip D.: And I believe that's that. So without further ado, let's dive on in with Access Champion Nicole Cromartie.

Philip D.: All right. We are here at our LEAD pop-up studio in Denver, on the second day. We're here with Nicole Cromartie, the director of education and programs at the Clyfford, with a Y, Still Museum, here in Denver, and also former intern of previous podcast guest, Lucas Livingston, out at the art Institute in Chicago.

Philip D.: Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to chat.

Nicole C.: Thank you for having me. This is so fun.

Philip D.: Yeah. Last year at LEAD was a lot of fun, with the popup studio. We had a blast, but I had a lot of people I already knew come through, which was great, because those were interviews that needed to happen. But this year, I'm meeting so many really wonderful and fascinating humans. It's just so exciting.

Philip D.: So, as you can see in the room and our listeners can hear, I'm really jazzed.

Nicole C.: Me too. Of course, I'm meeting so many people here at the conference too. It's been amazing.

Philip D.: One, I love the small world and obviously Lucas mentioned you on the podcast, and I'd love to hear a little bit about your journey and how you ended up in this role, here in Denver.

Nicole C.: Can I start when I was a very young child?

Philip D.: Absolutely.

Nicole C.: Okay. So, some of my earliest memories in childhood we're going to an art museum with my grandmother in Jacksonville, Florida, the Cummer Museum of art and gardens. I think there's an educator here at the conference from there. I don't remember how old I was, honestly, but I know that I was really young and they had a special area for children to go that was incredible. I could've just spent an entire day in there.

Nicole C.: I didn't realize this at the time. I was much older when I realized this, but both my grandmother and I were sort of unlikely candidates for art museum visitation. My grandmother grew up on a farm in North Florida, didn't have a college degree. She was not what you would call a typical art museum visitor. And same with me as a very young child.

Nicole C.: And of course, all of that's really changing in the museum field right now, thankfully, finally. But at the time, and this was in the early eighties, that just wasn't the case. And the older I got, the more I realized how lucky I had been that my grandmother loved the arts, felt empowered to go into this very fancy art museum on the river in Jacksonville, and to take her very young grandchild. I realized that was sort of an act of bravery on her part, to expose both herself and me to this incredible space.

Nicole C.: Long story short, that, I think is the beginning of my journey, that I fell in love with museums then and I realized what an incredible special place they are. But then I also realized that they aren't accessible to so many different types of people and that was something that I wanted to change, as soon as I started to develop an awareness about that.

Nicole C.: So I majored in art history in undergrad, knowing that I was going to work in museums in some capacity. I did a million internships that I hated. I worked in registration, I worked in public art, I did prep work, you know, like building the vitrines and cases that go and exhibitions.

Philip D.: Oh, okay.

Nicole C.: And I say hated though. I had like a million amazing supervisors and mentors through this journey. But I was really just crossing things off my list like, "Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope". And then had a really formational experience in West Texas, working for a small art museum called the Chinati Foundation. And my job as an intern was giving tours of the collection, the collection was only accessible by tours at that time.

Nicole C.: So I would have people, art experts flying in from Germany to see this collection. But then I'd also have just folks who were driving through Marfa, Texas on like a cross country road trip in their Harley, and thought it'd be really funny to go to this weird art museum in the desert. A lot of times, those people would be on the same tour.

Philip D.: Awesome.

Nicole C.: Yes. Which made my job really interesting, but, really a meaningful exercise in how do you make art museum experiences meaningful for all types of people? And especially when they're all in the same conversation. So that was a huge challenge.

Nicole C.: So, straight from Marfa, Texas, I moved to Chicago to work with Lucas, and there, my mind was completely blown open to the world, specifically of accessibility. He taught me to lead tours for folks with low vision, both for folks who had acquired a low vision later in life and who were born with low vision. I've never looked at paintings, the same sense, you know?

Philip D.: Yeah. It's a different part of your brain opens up when you have a very personal experience with another human, who maybe has a barrier that you don't necessarily have. I had a similar experience after a couple of years in my role with TDF at their autism friendly performances. My awareness of sound and light, and just entire sensory intake was heightened, just because I was immersed in this community where there needed to be an awareness of these things. So, I began all my work with this sort of sensibility and also just taking in everything around me, in that way, and with that idea in mind. So I get that 100%.

Nicole C.: Yeah. That experience has never left me and I refer to it all the time. I continue to have experiences like that. I ended up going to grad school in San Francisco and then pretty quickly got a job at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia. I was there for almost 10 years. During that time, I think my ways of thinking about access really expanded, from just thinking about the art on the walls or on the pedestals and thinking about the entire experience that people have in the museum, from the facilities to the programming, of course exhibitions, the website, the full experience of how we are welcoming all people into museums, which is everyone's mission.

Philip D.: Yeah, absolutely. What was the jump from Chicago, here?

Nicole C.: Well, from Chicago, I went to San Francisco for grad school.

Philip D.: Okay.

Nicole C.: From San Francisco, I went to Atlanta.

Philip D.: Okay. So just bounce around the country.

Nicole C.: I worked at the High Museum. Yes, I've learned so much. Then I was also at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights for a year, also while I was in Atlanta. And then I just started this position in Denver six months ago.

Philip D.: Hey, now.

Nicole C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: How do you like Denver?

Nicole C.: I love it.

Philip D.: Okay.

Nicole C.: Now that I know what kind of lotion I need to use and I'm drinking water all the time. I've started to adjust to the dryness and the altitude.

Philip D.: Yes, this is important.

Nicole C.: But, it did take me some time. I don't know if you're struggling with that, right now.

Philip D.: A little bit. Day one, I was wandering around 16th street and I just went, "I'm not sweating, but I feel warm", and for our listeners who have never actually seen me, but maybe have heard me, I'm very white. About as white as it gets. Like Conan O'Brien white. And I just went, "Oh, I think I'm probably getting sunburned".

Nicole C.: I was going to say, you're actually a little pink.

Philip D.: Yeah. I caught a little color between then and yesterday. And then I did have an elevation headache yesterday, which was not fun, but I got it to go away. But yeah, the water's real. A couple people were talking about some dry eyes and stuff. It's an adjustment. This is like LEAD plus survival training.

Nicole C.: Yes.

Philip D.: You know, Betty didn't put that in the program.

Nicole C.: That's true.

Philip D.: Not only will you learn about accessibility, but you'll learn how to survive.

Nicole C.: Yes.

Philip D.: Yeah. I completely get that adjustment. So, six months. Have you done a winter here?

Nicole C.: Yeah, I moved here in February.

Philip D.: Oh, okay.

Nicole C.: So I was like, let's just jump right in. And it's just gotten better. I'm from the South originally too, so I work well with heat. But yeah, it's just gotten better since February.

Philip D.: That's right. Well, you were in Chicago for a minute.

Nicole C.: I was.

Philip D.: I can't do Chicago. I poorly, and it coincided with some other work stuff, went out there to do all those interviews in February and I knew better. That wind is wicked, it just beats you up. I love the people there. I love them so much, but yeah, I can't do Chicago.

Nicole C.: Yeah. If it weren't for Lucas Livingston, I would not have been there for nearly as long as I was.

Philip D.: That's fair. I get that. Again, I spent probably two hours with the guy and I was like, "Yeah. You're crazy talented and brilliant", and creating a wonderful culture there too, which is really, really, really great. Also, he was the first guest that was a previous listener, so he checked that box for me, which was really exciting.

Nicole C.: That's awesome. Yeah, and he's training a whole cohort of Access Champions, that are all over the country. Maybe internationally.

Kelsey R.B.: Hello inclusion believers. Associate producer, Kelsey Rose Brown, here her remind you to head over to Patreon for amazing exclusive content, like Elizabeth Ralston's interview about access in Seattle, Cat Germain changing the game of audio description, and of course, Phil being quizzed on the constitution. All amazing in their own right and all available for as little as \$1 a month.

Kelsey R.B.: As a Patreon supporter, not only do you get that amazing content, but you also get flags, stickers and interactive opportunities such as our upcoming book club. It's for sure, not to be missed. So go ahead and head over to [www.patreon.com/accesschampions](http://www.patreon.com/accesschampions) and join our team of diversity defenders today.

Philip D.: So now that you're in this role for six months, what are some of the things you're working on here?

Nicole C.: Well, one of the other really great thing about the Clyfford Still Museum is that we're a new institution, also. We just opened in 2011, so they've done the NEA checklist. The building is brand new, it was purpose built for this incredible collection of Clyfford Still's life work. And now, we're really looking at what's next. How can we continue to be more inclusive, break down more barriers for access in the institution? And that's a big part of my job.

Philip D.: Yeah.

Nicole C.: Which is incredible. It's so exciting. First on the list is creating both an internal and external committee task force. Still working on the name. If you're out there in Denver and you're interested, please contact me. And really developing sort of our next step for

the access plan. We have an incredible groundwork laid, but how can we sort of continue that at the museum?

Philip D.: That's awesome.

Nicole C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: For our listeners who maybe aren't familiar, can you tell us a little bit about Clyfford still?

Nicole C.: Yes. He was an abstract expressionist. He had a relationship with Rothko and Pollock, some better known abstract painters at the time. And he was someone who really withdrew from the art world. He was in New York, felt that his work was really best viewed in context with his own work, and wasn't finding a lot of support, the kind of support that he needed from galleries and museums in New York. So he really withdrew from the art scene, leaving a lot of money and fame on the table, I think, and moved to the country in Maryland to paint for the rest of his life.

Nicole C.: So, he was an artist that was filled with integrity and not only, I think advocating for himself as an artist, but for other artists. And in his will, he left him his entire art collection, which was 95% of everything he ever created, to a great American city who would build a purpose built museum in his honor, to house his collection and also his personal archives. So after many cities were sort of vying for this collection, Denver won, and so the art collection actually belongs to the city and the people of Denver.

Philip D.: That's fantastic. So, on its most basic level, it is accessible because it is owned by the residents here.

Nicole C.: Yeah.

Philip D.: That's awesome.

Nicole C.: Or we sure as heck better make it accessible-

Philip D.: Yes.

Nicole C.: ... to them because it belongs to them.

Philip D.: There's a sense of ownership that you get to have walking in the door that's a typical of museums. Obviously, you walk in and you're amazed by this work that are lent by like private collectors or what have you, and there's a distance, I think, in a lot of ways that doesn't happen if again, it's owned by the city. That's dope.

Nicole C.: I know. It's really exciting as an educator, to say, "This is yours. This is ours".

Philip D.: What a great segue though, as you're with students and all of that. That's really, really great. I love to let people dream their dreams. It's my favorite thing in the world. What do you hope for, and I'll put it in the micro and the macro, because of your wealth of experience across the country, what do you hope for the future of the Clyfford Still Museum's accessibility and inclusion efforts? And what do you hope for the museum field in general? And you can get as high level as you want, philosophical as you want, but I'd love to ... because I think uniquely, you have a lot of perspective in that.

Nicole C.: Yeah. I think both the museum and the field are really headed in good directions. The American Alliance of Museums is the really big professional organization for our museums, and they've really recently made a commitment to diversity, equity, access and inclusion. That's been a theme, I think at the past three conferences for the last three years. To me it really signals a shift in our field, that is way, way, way overdue, but nonetheless, it's happening and I think more people are on board with that than ever before, which is incredibly exciting. Just in the short time that I've been in the field, I've seen such a shift in the way people are talking about DAI. So that's huge.

Philip D.: Yeah, I support that. I've also noticed that, I think we can see it with some of the local city consortium's as well, the museums are heavily involved. One of the things I've been saying to my colleagues in theater, theater is playing catch up, performing arts are playing catch up.

Nicole C.: Really?

Philip D.: In a lot of ways, I think museums are leading the way, especially when it comes to some of the new dementia friendly programming that's starting to be rolled out, some of the technology that's being rolled out. Some of that is for practical application, but, my museum colleagues, I'm constantly amazed by.

Nicole C.: That's so great to hear.

Philip D.: So yeah, I'm optimistic, as I can tell you are. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to chat. Thank you for all the work that you're doing. Thank you to Lucas Livingston for giving you that experience and thank you for being an Access Champion.

Nicole C.: Thanks for having me.

Philip D.: Thanks again to Nicole for taking the time to chat, popping by our pop-up studio. And good to know, that it is Clyfford with a Y, and not Clifford, as Kelsey and I were debating before that interview started.

Philip D.: Just another great conversation and just so grateful. We're slowly working our way through the last few of our interviews from Denver and we have more and more interviews. We still have a few from Philly, and we have some that we've done more recently, locally and and and such. But it's wild to think that we walked out with 20 some odd interviews in Denver and they're starting to whittle away between here, the



mainstream podcasts and some of the ones that we released exclusively on Patreon, which again, if you haven't already signed up to support us and get access to those incredibly dope interviews and additional content and conversations and games and such. It's literally \$1 a month and you can do that at [patreon.com/accesschampions](https://patreon.com/accesschampions) for \$1 a month. That's all you have to commit to. We're releasing more and more content on there and we're trying to make it as worthwhile a venture. I think it's incredible bang for your \$1.

Philip D.: Again, there are higher levels of support, which if that is something that you can put into your journey, we are incredibly appreciative. But we would be so, so grateful if you would consider committing \$1 a month to the show.

Philip D.: And I think that's that. So thank you, as always to our executive producer, Matt Kerstetter for making a sound great each and every single week. Thank you to our associate producer, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown for everything that she does. Thank you to our Champion intern Savannah Cooper for all she does across social media. Thank you to Tommy Karr for our dope logos. Thank you to Eric Walton and Austin Begley for the music on this show.

Philip D.: We'll be back again next week and remember, inclusion believers, never stop running through that brick wall.