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Melissa Mailey: Episodes come out every other Monday on all major pod catchers.

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 have a great episode for you guys this week, the very first episode of 2020 after a few weeks off, we are re-energized, recharged, and ready to take on another year of the Access Champions podcast, diving into fantastic conversations around work, delving into accessibility, diversity and inclusion in disability and gender, LGBTQ plus, language, socioeconomics as it relates to culture, and I'm just super excited.

Philip D.: And our first interview is one that's a good bit coming. We headed on over to MoMA, as it's affectionately known as The Museum of Modern Art. And sat down with Francesca Rosenberg and Lara Schweller over there and learned a lot. Really had my mind blown a little bit about how long MoMA has been striving to be an inclusive institution and to help others and be a part of different communities.

Philip D.: Just really fantastic work happening there and really, really excited to share that conversation with all of you. And I should know that at the top of this I said you guys, and I'm really trying to drop that phrase. I know that it is in fact not inclusive. And I was reading an article about that the other day and it wasn't something I'd ever thought of and it didn't necessarily feel nitpicky either.

Philip D.: You think, oh that's an easy adjustment. But the phrase you guys is something that I've said for years, 30 some odd years. So trying to transition to words like folks and everyone and all of those things gender neutral terms to be inclusive

because I know that some times gender specific terms can be triggering for folks and we are constantly striving to be the most inclusive podcast possible.

Philip D.: That's not just our new year's resolution, that is our resolution as an organization, as a podcast, as a show and as champions of the champions as we try to champion all the great work that's happening out there.

Philip D.: As always, if you don't already, go ahead and give us a follow on social media, where @AccessChampion on Instagram and Twitter and The Access Champion podcast on Facebook. You can also find us on [patreon.com/accesschampions](https://patreon.com/accesschampions), if you feel so compelled to support us monetarily. You can actually support us for just \$1 a month. And we don't just like take your money, we also give you things for it such as a sticker or a T-shirt or access to exclusive interviews and deep dive conversations.

Philip D.: We just opened up one to the public and we're going to keep it open for another couple of weeks and it was a conversation with Elizabeth Ralston out in the Pacific Northwest and all the work that she's doing with the Seattle Kings County Accessibility Consortium out there. Really dope work. Give it a listen on [patreon.com/accesschampions](https://patreon.com/accesschampions). And if you dig it and you want more content like that. Again, \$1 a month opens up that door to you.

Philip D.: We had a few new supporters come through the holidays and that's really great, but we are striving to gain more and work towards completely subsidizing things like our transcripts and our upcoming ASL videos and travel to different conferences and areas where really dope things are happening. We want to share what is happening there.

Philip D.: So again [patreon.com/accesschampions](https://patreon.com/accesschampions). And it is a little bit bittersweet that I like you all know that there is an opportunity to join the podcast team. We have posted a listing for a new associate producer. Ms. Kelsey Rose Brown is taking on lots and lots more out in the world in her journey towards becoming a speech language pathologist. So we do need to bring someone else in the team. Kelsey obviously is not leaving us, she will always be a part of us and she's transitioning over to our advisory board.

Philip D.: But if you or someone you know would be interested in this kind of work, we've shared the listing across social media and we'll link to it again here. You get to work with me. It's a remote possible position, so you can literally be anywhere in the world and work with us and it's going to be a lot of fun.

Philip D.: So again, if you or someone you know is interested, please click the link for the posting and submit an application and let's chat about it. I think it's a fun group to work with, a great mission that we're working towards in spreading the knowledge of this work that's out there. So hopefully you do too. All right. And that is that. So without further ado, let's head on over to some Access Champions at the MoMA.

Philip D.: All right. And we are here at The Museum of Modern Art or MoMA, as it's affectionately known. And we're here with Francesca Rosenberg, who is the director of community access and school programs and Lara Schweller, associate educator community and access programs. Thanks for taking the time to chat guys.

Lara S.: Thanks for having us Phil.

Francesca R.: Yeah, we're so happy to be talking with you.

Philip D.: So we were chatting a little bit before we started because there's just a wealth of knowledge in the room and history with MoMA. So Francesca, I'd love to start with you and hear a little bit about your history here.

Francesca R.: I do have a long history here. I have been working at MoMA since 1994 which means that I just celebrated my 25th anniversary with the museum. And it's been quite a ride, a terrific ride honestly. I started out as the museum's first special needs coordinator.

Philip D.: Okay.

Francesca R.: Yes. Which is clearly an outdated term, but it meant at least that I could devote all of my time and energy thinking about visitors with disabilities. And that really meant that I was the first person that had that opportunity.

Philip D.: And just looking at the scene around you when you started where there, feels like it was a pretty unique title at the time, an opportunity to delve into this world.

Francesca R.: Yes. It really was. I felt very fortunate to have the chance to have a full time job at MoMA. Just thinking about this particular population. It was not a job that was available at many of the small or large institutions across New York or certainly not nationally or even internationally. And it was actually meant to be a two year position.

Philip D.: Okay.

Francesca R.: It was grant funded.

Philip D.: All right. Yeah.

Francesca R.: And I was afraid that it would actually end after two years. And to be honest with you, it's so long ago that I don't remember exactly what happened, but somehow I was able to talk my way into getting budget rolled into the operating budget. And so I was able to stay on.

Philip D.: I know that feeling all too well. The job that kind of brought me into the Access world of New York was with TDF's, Autism Theater Initiative and it was a, what is it called, full time temporary position.

Francesca R.: Yes.

Philip D.: And it was only meant to be for a year and I just did my best to make myself indispensable. And yeah, I just remember it being kind of nerve wracking like, this is what I want to do and this seems really great, but there's this ticking clock of like it could go away. And obviously luckily they kept it going over there, but obviously here as well. So what was the, I don't know if you were privy to this, what was sort of the impetus for MoMA to create this position?

Francesca R.: Well, I guess the five years before, was the passing of the Americans with disabilities act. So legally the museum was obliged to be compliant. So I think that was on their mind. But also the museum, MoMA has a really long history of serving diverse audiences. And even dating back to the 1940s when we had what was called The War Veterans Art Center, which really meant that war veterans coming back could come to MoMA and be a part of classes where they could use art as a tool for rehabilitation into civilian life. And so now many years later we're still thinking about diverse populations and what we can do to meet their needs.

Philip D.: That's fantastic. It sounds like the early forms of art therapy...

Francesca R.: As part of The War Veterans Art Center, the individuals that participated learned vocational skills. So they were taught woodworking and printing and all sorts of things that would be very useful to them in terms of future job employment.

Philip D.: That's fantastic. Employment's such a thing right now, especially in diverse communities like that. So the fact that MoMA was already thinking about that way back when, essentially is fantastic. So there's really a tremendous art then for MoMA having sort of outreach to underserved communities. After you started, what were some of the things that developed under your watch?

Francesca R.: When I came here, I had experience working with people who are blind and partially sighted because I had been employed by what was then called Art Education for the Blind, and which is now called Art Beyond Sight.

Philip D.: Okay. I love Art Beyond Sight.

Francesca R.: Yeah. It's a very small world, right?

Philip D.: Yeah.

Francesca R.: So it was Elizabeth Axle. It was Elizabeth Salzhauer at the time who hired me. And so I really learned a great deal from her and from all the people I came into contact with through that small but mighty organization. So when I came to MoMA, I felt very comfortable kind of taking on, for instance, the Touch Tours that they've had here since 1972. Those are-

Philip D.: That's amazing.

Francesca R.: Yeah.

Philip D.: I'm thinking of all the places just launching Touch Tours and that's amazing.

Francesca R.: Yeah. And today we still continue those Touch Tours. For anyone who doesn't know, they're tours in which works of art, all original from our collection, primarily bronze, but also made of other materials are able to be touched. We have gloves, but they still let through the temperature and the texture of the works of art and it's works by Picasso and Matisse and Rhoda. And it's still one of the most special parts of my job is to be able to lead those touch rows and to be able to touch those works of art.

Francesca R.: So I felt very comfortable when I came here doing those kinds of things, but I felt like I really needed to learn about other audiences, about other types of disabilities. Formed different advisory groups. I actually became part of MAC, which not everybody knows, but years and years and years ago there was an original Museum Access Consortium group. So when I came to MoMA in 1994, it was already in existence.

Philip D.: Oh, really?

Francesca R.: Yes.

Philip D.: I definitely didn't know that.

Francesca R.: Yeah. Pearl Rosen, who's now Pearl Golden was one of the original members of that group. And that group, just like today, we got together, we learned from one another, we supported one another, but it wasn't as strong. It really wasn't because there weren't as many individuals at different organizations that had the support of their organizations to be able to pull together events and public programs as we do today.

Philip D.: And that's so important. We talk about it a lot on the show. I think organizational buy-in is, you can't overstate how much that means from the top down. And it's sounds like, I will never say in the nonprofit world that we always have it, but it sounds like a good chunk of the time that you had it.

Francesca R.: I have had it, I have to say, in different ways, but I've really always felt supported whether it was by the heads of my particular department, which is

education, but also from the senior leadership of The Museum of Modern Art. Glenn Lowry has been a strong supporter of making the museum as accessible as possible to everybody. It was James Gara who is our chief operating officer who a number of years ago at this point in stated had an accessibility task force.

Philip D.: Okay.

Francesca R.: This is made up of representatives from across the institution. Virtually every department at this point is represented from frontline staff. So the head of security and operations and membership, retail, visitor engagement, but also members of the behind the scenes staff including exhibition design and AV digital media and so on and so forth. And we come together to look at the museum as a whole.

Francesca R.: We take a museum wide approach to accessibility and inclusion and it's really the museum's commitment to ensure that all visitors feel welcome and that they have equal access to all aspects of the collection, the programs and all the things that we're doing here at MoMA.

Philip D.: That's fantastic because then you have all of, every department essentially taking ownership over these ideas of access and inclusion rather than it just being pointing to one person and go, oh, it's an access thing. So it's their job, not me.

Francesca R.: It's true. You said it very well. I felt personally for many, many years being a one woman department, one woman acts as department that things did fall on me and it was really up to me to think through all aspects of accessibility and really to hound people about making things more open and an equal for all. And that again is everything from putting in a ramp or putting up clear signage to making sure that our educators are well trained to lead tours for all different and so on.

Francesca R.: But now it really does feel like it is thought through by virtually all departments and that it's no longer the purview of one area, but it's really everybody's job. It's become a part of the DNA of the institution and embedded across all areas.

Philip D.: That's amazing. And-

Francesca R.: It's taken a long time.

Philip D.: Listen, it's the nonprofit way. We will get there, we're just going to move at our own pace and it'll be just fine.

Francesca R.: But I am proud. I'm proud that MoMA and all of my colleagues really are so thoughtful and do such hard work towards this.

Philip D.: Yeah, absolutely. We're going to take a brief break and when we come back, we're going to hear a little bit about what's going on right now at the MoMA.

Alex Delare: Hi there. I'm Alex Delare and I was on Phil dallmann's Access Champions episode 80. I loved meeting Phil and sharing our stories about accessibility, inclusivity and MAC or The Museum Arts and Culture Access Consortium together. Did you realize that there's even more amazing access champion stories out there? I know, it's true. For just \$1 a month you can get access to exclusive interviews, games, and soon even a book club. Oh, that sounds like fun.

Alex Delare: In order to get all this access, please go to [www.patreon.com/accesschampions](http://www.patreon.com/accesschampions) and sign up. You can get all sorts of fabulous perks like awesome swag, on air shout outs and stickers. Who doesn't like stickers? Thank you for considering joining the team of Inclusion Warriors for only \$1 a month at [www.patreon.com/accesschampions](http://www.patreon.com/accesschampions). We so appreciate your support

Philip D.: And we're back with the team from MoMA. Francesca and Lara. So we talked a little bit about a, not a little bit. We talked about MoMA's history and really where it's come from. I'd love to hear a little bit about the current state of community and Access programs as we enter a new year.

Francesca R.: Yes. Happy new year. Well, we're going strong. We have, many programs both on and off site and work with very diverse populations. We currently serve close to 10,000 people through our Access programs and then another 10,000 through our community programs.

Philip D.: That's fantastic.

Francesca R.: All the programs that we do in collaboration with outside nonprofit community organizations serving all different kinds of audiences from new immigrants to LGBTQ audiences, to older adults, just to name a few. And we also offer as part of those numbers, monthly programs.

Philip D.: Okay.

Francesca R.: Those programs include art insight, which is a program where we provide visual descriptions and galleries for people with no or low vision. We have interpreting MoMA, which is a program for deaf adults. I think people love that program because the educators are so good, but it's also because we do it after hours. So they really feel like VIPs, I hope.

Philip D.: Little MoMA after dark.

Francesca R.: Yes.

Philip D.: I like it.

Francesca R.: With some wine and cheese to start.

Philip D.: Hey.

Francesca R.: You're invited.

Philip D.: I'm going to put it on my calendar. That sounds great. Wine and cheese is all you have to say. I'll go almost anywhere with that tagline.

Francesca R.: Well tell me about it. Our boss always jokes around that food is human currency, so we-

Philip D.: I'm stealing that. That's fantastic.

Francesca R.: That's what I always tell people, if they want to know how to make a program successful, just throw in the wine and cheese. And what else? We have Meet Me at MoMA still. This is a program that we developed many years ago at this point, specifically for people with Alzheimer's or other dementia and their care partners. And that was a great initiative because we had very generous funding from the MetLife foundation that enabled us to take what we were doing locally and share it with colleagues and Alzheimer's associations across the country and then all over the world.

Philip D.: Wow.

Francesca R.: Yeah.

Philip D.: That's great.

Francesca R.: Yeah. And so now I'm happy to say that over 200 cultural institutions have programs specifically for this audience. So that's something that we're very proud and excited about. And the other monthly program that we do is Create Ability, which is a program for people with developmental and learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. Younger people come in the mornings and then older, I should say adults, come in the afternoon. And that program, like many of our programs is both an art making and an art looking opportunity.

Philip D.: Okay.

Francesca R.: Yeah.

Philip D.: So there's a practical aspect to it in addition to consuming the art around you. That's wonderful. Lara do you want to tell us anything more?

Lara S.: Sure. Well, Create Ability was launched in 2005. So we recently celebrated our 15th year of the program, which is really exciting. And I'll just say one of my favorite parts about this program is really the longevity of the community. There's one participant in particular, I won't share their name, but they started coming to the program as a child, to our morning program. They grew up with us to participate in the pilot of our teen program for Create Ability, which is now its own group as part of the morning program. And then they grew even more

and continued to and still come to our afternoon program for adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Philip D.: That's fantastic. That kind of retention is wonderful.

Lara S.: Yeah. And I'll just share that at our recent Create Ability, our educators who are just fantastic, they're primarily teaching artists. They are fantastic at thinking outside of the box. They're really working with people who communicate in a lot of different ways. They had created a mural project for all of the participants who were following different drawing prompts within the studio. And for the last prompt, they asked people to draw something that gave them power.

Philip D.: Okay.

Lara S.: Yeah. And this particular person drew a big blue mouth and when we went around the room and asked everyone to share if they wanted to or to reflect on what they had created that day, he said that he drew a mouth because his voice gives him power. And within that year, after creating that artwork, what was so exciting is that we were able to bring him on as part of our disability equality training project, which Francesca can tell you more about. But he completed this amazing interview for us as part of that.

Speaker 5: That's fantastic. I do want to hear more about that disability equality training project.

Francesca R.: So that project came about as an initiative of the MoMA Accessibility Task Force. And for many years we've done training primarily for frontline staff. And while that training served various purposes, I still felt like there was more that we could do. And we actually sent out a survey to all staff asking them to respond to all sorts of questions about their job and the challenges that they faced in being able to better serve visitors with disabilities and so on.

Francesca R.: And what we learned were, many things that we ended up incorporating into the trainings. But what we noticed was kind of an attitudinal barrier that was clear in many of the responses. It was a sort of way that people were answering the questions. It felt like it was a kind of us and them, that people felt... They were using words like my former title, like special needs, right? They were describing people with disabilities as having special needs and being different and other.

Francesca R.: And honestly, I feel like many people have this kind of discomfort, right? They have this kind of fear and it doesn't cover my bad place, it comes from not really knowing and not having these kinds of experiences with people with disabilities perhaps. So we wanted to kind of rethink our training and see if we could get to an attitudinal shift. And we felt that really the way to do that was to focus on empathy and having people think differently and hear specifically from people with disabilities about their experiences both at art museums and in life.

Francesca R.: And so that was how these videos came about. We worked with nine people with different backgrounds, different disabilities, different abilities. And we worked with this great group of individuals that came to us and filmed interviews with us and spoke to us about what their lives are like and why they like to go to museums and what they want from museums and what they definitely don't want from museums.

Francesca R.: And we also filmed them in scenarios at MoMA, scenarios that are based on real life situations that have a take one and a take two. And in take one, the interaction is a negative interaction. So I'll just say Betty Sue is having, is coming into the museum. She uses a seeing eye dog and she gets stopped by someone from the front line staff and they have an exchange.

Francesca R.: And so as attendees of the training, we watch this video and talk about what went well and what went really badly and what that staff member could have done differently. And in take two, we see that staff member and that interaction being more positive but leaving room for it to be even better and have discussions with the disability equality training workshop attendees about what we can do at MoMA to be the most welcoming institution and how we can be sure that we don't fall short when it comes especially to disabilities.

Lara S.: Yeah. And I'll jump in here and say that one, this is a three hour training, which is a long time to sit together with a group of about 15 of your peers and colleagues. So our team was training staff across MoMA and if you want to picture the setup, we would begin these trainings in a circle to all begin speaking. And we would start by asking people to think about their own experiences with feeling not included or feeling disrespected or feeling unwelcome to really get at the idea that we all know what it feels like to feel unwelcome or disrespected in different situations.

Lara S.: We all know what it feels like to feel welcomed and what we can do is try to approach empathy building for people with disabilities through this universal experience and then think specifically about how people of disabilities might be discriminated against, how they might be made to feel unwelcome in very specific ways and what we can do as an institution to move past that and really be welcoming.

Philip D.: That's really wonderful. And I'm assuming based off the fact you guys have a task force and all the programs you launch, that the staff has been fairly receptive to this training.

Francesca R.: Yes. The staff have been wonderful. It was part of a larger museum wide training which was called One MoMA. And so everything that we in our three hours help to reinforce what they were already talking about in these other trainings about being welcoming and really targeting ways to be as hospitable as possible. I have to say that our training was developed in consultation with Maureen Gilbert who is an independent Access consultant and will likely be

around during the lead conference in Dublin because she's Irish. So she's a good person to get to know.

Philip D.: And listeners that is a great segue for a shameless plug to remember to sign up on Patreon to support the podcast so that we can go over to, I believe it's Access to Inclusion, the the summit in Ireland this spring. Remember that's [patreon.com/accesschampions](https://patreon.com/accesschampions).

Philip D.: So my favorite part of any interview is allowing the opportunity to dream. We don't necessarily get that a lot in the world of culture and the arts and nonprofit and inclusion because budgets. But I'd love to hear from both of you what your dream is for MoMA going forward.

Lara S.: Thank you for that question and opportunity. That is an overwhelming and an exciting thing to think about. I'd say for me one dream for MoMA because I think there are many, but one dream is that the museum just continues to work with people with disabilities, to bring people with disabilities in to advise, work, consult, lead our efforts in different ways.

Lara S.: It has been so exciting to work with the self advocates who produce these training videos with us this past year and in these trainings it has been fundamental to hear directly from people with disabilities. And I've seen the shift in our staff. I've seen this one young adult who I mentioned who has been coming to Create Ability, he speaks on such a sensitive and articulate and vulnerable and also powerful way about his experience of living with autism.

Lara S.: People are moved to tears after his video and people really, one person came away after watching it and, it was a security officer and she just sort of shook her head and said, "People are people." And like that was her big takeaway. And so if we can continue to work with individuals with disabilities to shift the boundaries of empathy building here at the museum, I feel very hopeful for a larger cultural push in that direction.

Philip D.: That's really wonderful. I love that. And I'll say what I love about that is it's moving forward with sort of that principle for the community by the community. And it kind of integrates and as you were talking about it, it's already in the DNA of MoMA to be inclusive and it's how you're being inclusive is that next step. And having those communities being part of that process is so important.

Philip D.: Far too often places are just, a couple people in a room make a bunch of decisions for a community that they're not a part of or having spoken to or sent out a survey to and they hope that it's correct and that's, it's like batting 500 proposition like, [inaudible 00:36:49], whereas you could be so... One of the things that I've always felt like common sense to me, was if you're doing something for someone, you should ask them what they want.

Francesca R.: Yes. Yeah.

Philip D.: It's like why we have to like Christmas lists and things, tell me what you want and then we can, maybe we can't do exactly what it is, maybe the budget doesn't allow for that but, or a logistic or sometimes we're dealing with a landmark or something like that. But we can get creative and we can get close to what your dream is for your experience at our institution. So that's really wonderful.

Lara S.: Yeah. And I feel very lucky to work with Francesca and our colleague Carrie McGee as well. Because as you said at the beginning of this interview from your start here, one of the first things you did was build an advisory groups. And it's great to be part of an institution that really values working with the communities that they're serving.

Francesca R.: And I have so many ideas for that question. I don't even know where to begin. But I guess I would just say it is the 30th anniversary of the ADA. And so it has been interesting to be able to look back and see how much progress has been made, but also to think about the future. I think a year or two ago I got Lara and Kerry shirts that a great designer whose name I can't remember, maybe you know her, she made these shirts that say "The Future is Accessible."

Philip D.: I do know who you are talking about. I have the shirt. [crosstalk 00:38:30].

Lara S.: I've got my pink one up stairs.

Francesca R.: Which I think is also a very hopeful message. But I just guess, I always hope that we don't have to wait so long. And as I pointed out before, it's just been slow going. But I would say that we have made great strides, certainly at MoMA and across cultural organizations in New York certainly and all over the country in the world.

Francesca R.: But I do hope that that we can keep focused on the work and keep taking steps and that it's not the future, but it's the now, is the present. And we talked a great deal before we got on air about about new programs, new buildings, new projects, and just how important it is to think through accessibility from the inception of these ideas and these projects. I still think that far too often we're reactive, which ends up costing a great deal and taking too much time and effort, whereas had we put these accessible plans into the very beginning of the projects, whatever they may be, it would make all the difference. So I just hope that across all disciplines, we can be thinking along those lines.

Philip D.: Absolutely. I think we're seeing sparks of that. I'll say, I mean just from where I'm sitting where it's just seeing more and more places either playing catch up a little bit quicker than they had been or again, some of these newer cultural institutions from the jump thinking, all right, well we want everyone to come here. So... And from the sounds of it MoMA had similar ideas from go.

Philip D.:

Well, thank you both for taking the time to chat. Thank you both so much for the work that you do and thank you for being Access Champions. Thanks again to Francesca and Lara for taking the time to chat and thank you to a gentleman whose name I did not get in the recording studio who lent me his headphones because my headphones had died. I hadn't checked the, the rookie mistake, I didn't check the charge level on my studio headphones. And so it was almost a bad situation and luckily MoMA has a recording which is really amazing and there's a mixture of headphones there. So really appreciate the save there. As a reminder again, if you don't already, follow us on social media @AccessChampion pretty much across the board. And you can also find us on [patreon.com/accesschampions](https://patreon.com/accesschampions) if you feel so inclined to support us.

Philip D.:

And one final way you can also support us is by rating and reviewing wherever you listen to your podcast. Give us a five star review. So we'll be back again next week. And remember inclusion believers, never stop running through that brick wall.