

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 different kind of episode for you guys this week. We are heading over to the Hall of Inclusion, opening the vault, and pulling out one of our first, actually the first, Patreon exclusive that we ever released on Patreon, which was an extended conversation with Talleri McRae, where we looked at supports, and resources, and sort of a little bit of best practices as it related to a sensory friendly, relaxed type settings for adults with cognitive and developmental disabilities.

Philip D.:

It was a great conversation, and Talleri is a tremendous resource. And if you are heading into this realm, there are some amazing, amazing folks out there to connect with including Talleri, Diane Nutting. The Kennedy Center has its own sort of resource guide as a whole, as does TDF, has sort of a training program where they guide you through, and that's free 99 both them and the Kennedy Center. So you can't beat that. And of course Roger Dashi who is our most recent Patreon exclusive, disgusting sort of prescriptive access, and the formulas that are starting to pop up that may be more, I don't want to say detrimental, but they're not allowing for progress and serving individuals at the highest capacity across accessibility.

Philip D.:

Now we focus in that conversation a lot about cognitive and developmental disability, and sort of sensory friendly, relaxed, but the principles remain the same across, in my opinion. And then that is my opinion to be clear, I think that there are certain things that we can do to move forward, and Roger and I discuss that on there/ and that is exclusive to Patreon, patreon.com/accesschampions. And because that was such a great conversation and I wanted to share it with so many people, and we are on our sort of kick, our hundredth episode is on its way, coming like a freight train. And we're so excited about it, but we want to see what we can do and getting a hundred patrons by episode 100.

Philip D.:

And to be clear, because I think sometimes people are like, "Oh, is that a way for you guys to make money?" And truly, it is for us to break even on the cost of this show and the cost creating this content weekly. Transcripts aren't cheap, good transcripts are not cheap, I should qualify. And the time and effort and all of that is actually not even really accounted for currently in our overhead. So, as I say, we're a show for the people by the people. So that's some transparency for you all there. And we do our best to make sure we're acquiring exclusive content, interesting exclusive content for Patreon, and we're trying to be more and more consistent with that. So in that sort of same headspace, I wanted to share with all of you what that kind of content looks like and sounds like.

Philip D.:

So that is why we're taking this from the Hall of Inclusion. It's a Hall of Inclusion exclusive we're going to share with you guys, and hopefully this may, if you were on the fence about committing a dollar a month to the show, and to exclusive content, and swag, and all the above, maybe this may put you over and can get you to sign up. So again, that's patreon.com/accesschampions. Some quick plugs for where else you can support us. On social media, give us a follow, give us a like at [accesschampion](https://www.instagram.com/accesschampion) on Instagram and Twitter, and [The Access Champion Podcast](https://www.facebook.com/TheAccessChampionPodcast) on Facebook.

Philip D.:

You can also rate and review us wherever you listen to the podcast. We really appreciate it. It means a lot to us. It helps us pop up when people are searching for us, all the different algorithms. So we are incredibly appreciative. Please hit us up with that five star review. If you're thinking about maybe giving us a four or less, go ahead and email us at accesschampion@gmail.com, and let us know what we can do to get that five star, because that's what I'm trying to do, and we're trying to do as a team here at Access Champions. And I think, for this week, that's that. So without further ado, from the Hall of Inclusion, Talleri McRae.

Philip D.:

All right. And we are here for our exclusive post interview discussion for our Patreon supporters. Thank you all for supporting us in the ways that you do as we continue to grow this organization. So I'm here still with Talleri. And as we were talking, I immediately got excited to discuss her experience creating a sensory friendly performance of the Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time at IRT, specifically because I was lucky enough to help handle the autism friendly performance here in New York with the Broadway show, and collaborate a bit with the National Theater in London on that. As we were chatting there, you mentioned designing both supports and the performance for a student audience versus the adult audience. If you could, could you share with us a little bit of your theories and philosophies in how those types of supports would differ?

Talleri M.:

Sure. So I love that you asked this question, because I've actually designed two different, or worked on the design team, I should say, for two different of sensory friendly performances of Curious Incident. One in 2017 in Indianapolis, and then one in 2018 at Actors Theater of Louisville. And I learned a lot in between. So if you'll indulge me, I'll do a little compare and contrast. So in 2017, part of the team for sensory friendly included the education department, and other departments at the theater. And particularly, my colleagues in the education department had some experience designing sensory friendly performances for young people. But we really wanted to make sure that we were designing an experience that was welcoming to young adults and two adult patrons that might be attending the theater on their own.

Talleri M.:

So I think one of the differences in terms of the nuts and bolts of resources, is that when you're designing resources, or when I'm designing resources for a younger audience, often times, I'm actually designing the resources for their parents. And this happens a lot, I know, with Sesame Street is a great example. When they're coming up with content and thinking about the way they want to talk about a topic, they have to think about how that is going to land for very young audience that's watching that TV, but also for their caregivers, their parents, as well and their families. So basically the challenge in 2017 was can we design materials that are not necessarily designed for a caregiver or a family, but directly for an autistic individual that might be interested in seeing a show?

Talleri M.:

So I felt good about that question, but I had no idea what the answer to that question was.

Philip D.:

Often the case in this field.

Talleri M.:

And I think my first version of the materials was almost exclusively words, because anytime I put in any kind of visual image or picture, I felt like I didn't want to "talk down" to the audience.

Philip D.:

Oh, I get that. That strikes such a true chord with me.

Talleri M.:

So that was my first draft, and I sent it to a service provider that we were working with in Indianapolis that works a lot with the autism community, and they said Talleri, "In general, the autistic community are very visual learners. So don't be afraid to give them visual support." And I was like, "I need help, I'm afraid, I'm afraid, help me." So it was just another round of research. They helped me, and helped me figure out how you could still offer that support, how you can find visual images. You can just kind of have to go to another level of Google search, whatever you're doing, to find those images that feel appropriate and respectful to that young adult and adult audience.

Philip D.:

So it's not necessarily the cartoon rabbit saying, "This is how I may feel," which is something I always struggled with that's utilized in social stories sometimes or social narratives, is the like, "I may feel this," and it's cartoon image as opposed to... And if I'm following, you're veering more towards a visual guide.

Talleri M.:

Yeah. So we did a visual guide. We used a lot of actual pictures of the space and the set that would be part of the experience. And the biggest thing I learned in that experience was that we actually helped craft, and this was mostly using words, so this didn't have a lot of visual images with it, but what we helped craft was the day of, almost schedule of the day, that provided patrons with options. So when they arrived at the theater, there were some options for things they could do. They could go to the box office and pick up their ticket. They could look around the lobby at the costume display that was on display. They could go find their seat, they could go to the bar to get a beverage or a snack. And we help them think through from the very beginning of their experience to the very end, when they set out to go home.

Talleri M.:

What are their options for engaging with the experience? They can choose to do it individually. They can choose to do it with other people, but we really wanted to provide them those choices. So it made me realize that structure is not the same thing as instruction. Oftentimes, writing for a young audience, you're writing materials that are kind of instructing them. But that you can offer adults a similar sense of structure and expectations. So that was the big takeaway of 2017.

Talleri M.:

In 2018, I was lucky enough, as I was preparing for doing the sensory friendly performance again, I was lucky enough to be invited to a small conference that was happening in Lexington, Kentucky, for self advocates. And it was specifically for the disability community. But as it turned out, there were a dozen teenagers with autism who were at this conference. So I'm running around all day with these autistic teenagers who are enthusiastic, and engaged, and they're facilitating conversations. And it was one of

those un conferences where there wasn't an agenda. The agenda was kind of set by the participants. And I got so excited to be connected with young people and they were incredibly honest with me. They said, "Talleri, as an autistic teenager, I have a lot of problems with the story of Curious Incident, and I want to talk about it. And I want to know if you're using an actor with autism for your role, for the play at Actors Theater."

Talleri M.:

And so that was exciting. But they wanted to know more about that process and how did that happen. And so rather than working primarily with the theater company, and with a service provider like I did in Indianapolis, we actually created a planning triangle. And we worked with a great local service provider, Heidi Cooley Koch, who works with the University of Louisville in the Autism Training Center there. We worked with the members of the theater staff, and then at every step of the process, we worked with a local self advocacy group called the Kentuckiana Autistic Self-Advocacy Network. Their nickname is KASA. So I think that's it. I think it's the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network. So at any given point, I could email one or more autistic consultants and say, "How does this phrasing work for you? How does this sound? How would you put together this material?"

Talleri M.:

And I learned so much from working directly with the community, and I felt really silly as an access consultant that it took me that long to figure it out, actually. But I learned so much. One of the things I learned was that as autistic individuals, they did not need as many concrete accommodations as I thought they would for seeing a play. They were much more interested in audience education, so that other audience members would know more about the experience of going to see a play with someone who is autistic. They said, "Can you help educate the audience to know the kinds of behaviors they might see, the kinds of sounds they might hear, the kinds of movements they might see, so that those not autistic audience members feel more comfortable and relaxed seeing a play if they're sitting near me?"

Philip D.:

I mean 1000% setting expectations for everyone, is for me, I feel like, 90% of the battle.

Talleri M.:

So much. And so they helped us create some really direct, that the thing, this is a welcoming space for all, and people are welcome to respond to the show however they would like is one thing. But creating a really direct, specific guide that says "You might see some stimming, here's what stemming could look like. It might look like this and it might look like this. And we also want you to know from within the autistic community, that here's how we feel about stimming. And most of the time, we actually think it's a really positive thing." And so I mean it was just incredible to get that direct and specific in communicating between the autistic and not autistic communities.

Talleri M.:

That I as somebody who's neuro-typical, I learned so much. And the biggest thing I learned is when it doubt, check in with somebody that's directly part of that community and you're going to get the best results possible. Even if, and especially if there's disagreement within that community about how to proceed. That I think is where I learned the most, is when I say, "Oh, we've got two really strong differing opinions. How can we proceed and be supportive allies and support the most welcoming space

possible, while still being realistic about the resources that we have?" And so I almost feel silly looking back at what I did in 2017 up in Indianapolis, only because we did not have as strong of an engagement from the autistic community in that process as we did in Louisville.

Talleri M.:

And so it just gives me hope that all of us are learners and all of us can keep evolving our practice, and trying to make it better as we go.

Philip D.:

Absolutely. And I think that is such an important principle, is engaging the community in the process of trying to support the community. That's whenever I work with any theater, museum, et cetera, creating that sort of advisory set up, whether it's your triangle, or an advisory council, or whatever, I think it sets you up for a greater success, I think, and sustainability.

Talleri M.:

And we're so fortunate in Louisville too that Actors Theater of Louisville has an open rehearsal policy.

Philip D.:

Oh, that's super cool.

Talleri M.:

So yeah. So our autistic advisers were... I was working with Meredith McDonough, who is one of the most generous directors on the planet. And so she said, at the very first rehearsal and throughout, she said, "Anybody is welcome to come at any time." So there was some autistic advisers that came to quite a few rehearsals. They set aside some time to talk specifically with the cast, and there was some more formal interactions, but it was really great to see that interaction. It was kind of ongoing. It wasn't like, "Oh, we'll have our once a month advisory meeting and take notes and see what we do." They really felt like part of our kind of day to day learning throughout that process. So that was great.

Philip D.:

That's awesome. Well, thank you for continuing the conversation and doing a little deep dive with me. And I'm sure we'll chat again soon.

Talleri M.:

Sounds great.

Philip D.:

Thank you from almost a year ago, Talleri, for extending your time chatting with me. It was a blast. And again, I can't say enough about the work that she's doing in that field, and as a cofounder, co-executive director of the National Disability Theater. So if you're intrigued by her, and you're intrigued by that conversation, go ahead and Google her. She's a tremendous consultant. And again, with the National Disability Theater doing incredible, incredible work.

Philip D.:

If you liked what you heard, please consider, please consider supporting us on Patreon. And this is the kind of content that we are releasing on there. It's these kinds of deep dives. I have exclusive conversations occasionally. It is a full interview that we release on there, but more often than not, it's these sort of deep dive, analytical conversations. And if that's what interests you at all, go ahead and you can sign up for literally just \$1 a month at patreon.com/accesschampions.

Philip D.:

Everything is Access Champions. We're really the only one out there with that. So if you plug that into Google, you're going to find all of the things. But for that one specifically, it's patreon.com/accesschampion. As always, thank you to our executive producer, Matt Kerstetter for all the work that he puts in, and making us just absolutely incredible every single week. Thank you, the one and only Allie B. for all the work she does as our associate producer. Thank you to our new Champion intern, Jay, for all the work that he's doing across social media. Thank you to Justin Campbell for the weekly artwork. Thank you to Tommy Karr for all of our logos. Thank you to Eric Walton and Austin Bailey for all of our music. We'll be back again next week and remember, inclusion believers, never stop running through that brick wall.