

[Music] [Narelle] Hello and welcome to, I think it's episode six of The Digital Access Show. Today's guest is someone I've been wanting to interview for a while. I met her through a networking group called BX and the way Grace tackles life head-on, and with a laugh is just such she's a great person for me to follow in the way she manages life. I'd like to introduce you all to Grace Cameron. Grace is the director and owner of Sunlight Bookkeeping, but I'm going to let Grace tell you a little bit about, Grace and Grace's story. Hi Grace, thanks for being here. [Grace] Hi Narelle, Thank you for having me. [Narelle] As I said, I'm excited to have you here. Grace, can you tell me a little bit about yourself. What you do, what Sunlight Bookkeeping is about? [Grace] Well, I suppose I'll go back a little bit from before that because that helps me start. [Narelle] Yep. [Grace] My first career was actually in landscape architecture. I wanted to be a glamorous designer, but I'm actually not very good at design. So in my career as landscape architecture, I did analysis and budgets and construction contracts and numbers. Then I got meningitis in 2010 and developed POTS. So my POTS means that I spend 20 to 23 hours a day lying down. I'm lying down right now, I have the, the screen above me and the camera above me. [Narelle] Thank you Grace, what is POTS? Can you explain? [Grace] Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome. And it's actually becoming more common and it's more of focus on it because a lot of people with long COVID developed POTS. So there's a, new research happening in it, which hopefully will provide some insights and some benefits soon. But essentially, my body doesn't maintain my blood pressure properly. So we have different things that we can do to increase blood pressure and, but my heart has to compensate. My heart has to work harder to keep blood circulating properly around my body. So if I sit up for too long, I get dizzy and I can't think because my brain isn't getting enough oxygen. [Narelle] Okay. [Grace] So [Narelle] So basically, you lie down on most of the time. [Grace] I lie down most of the time and when it first happened, I spent years mostly on my own in my bedroom bored and isolated and just challenged getting through the basic tasks of caring for myself and my family helping to care for me. And eventually getting adequate supports through State Government Funding and then through the NDIS changed, changed a lot for me and I enabled me to go back and retrain and study. I looked at my skills and my interests. I've had an interest in small business for a long time and from landscape architecture, but creative problem-solving, and numbers and analysis. And so I picked bookkeeping because I could do that incorporate all those things and do it lying down. And I started my business and we launched in February, the 1st of February last year. So where I've just had a birthday. [Narelle] Happy Birthday! [Grace] Thank you. It's been, it's been a fantastic amazing process because it's changed so much for me. I have, I still spend all my time well most of my time lying down but now I have access to the business community through networking and through my clients and through my team members and all these inspiring people in my life. I'm learning so much about different things and it's just a lot more richness and I feel like so much has opened up for me. [Narelle] So, what was the reason, like at that point when you were sitting in your room by yourself? What was that reason that made you change? Was that you didn't like your life at that time? And you said, well, there's got to be something better. Was it, oops, I've got funding now that I can now change my life and make it better? What was it? What was it, was it family? Thank you. Come on, Grace. [Grace] No. I had, I had, CentreLink had me on disability and said that I couldn't work actually and family saying that I couldn't push myself. That that would be too hard and I shouldn't work. But once I had the funding and the extra support, I think I had that pressure relieved from just keeping

myself clean and fed and those fundamental tasks that you have to do. And I wanted challenge. I just wanted something more but also I wanted financial security, a long-term interest in my life. I wanted access to things outside. Yeah, and that I think I've always been a little bit of a workaholic. And I think returning to work was probably a natural kind of choice, yeah, idea for me. Just [Narelle] With your journey, so you've taken it in a year from an idea. [Grace] No. [Narelle] To to a complete business. [Grace] What I No, there was quite a bit of preparation before the launch. [Narelle] Okay, yep. [Grace] So it was February 1st I opened for new clients. And I think for a year and a half before that we had been doing some preparation. I've been, been doing some training in small business and had help from a program that helps, Ignite, that helps people with disability start businesses and we created a business plan and I've had some family-friendly clients to kind of practice my systems on. So yes. [Narelle] It's still, in a year you've taken this business quite a long way. I mean, I know there was one conference that you were trying to get me to go to and I was like oh, I don't think I can do this. I don't think I can do this. You've done it. And what was your experience at that conference? Because one of my things is, obviously, when I'm at home, I'm in my own space. I'm very confident. It's very able to manage anything. But take me out of a space that I know and I find it much harder. The systems aren't there. The tools aren't there. What about for you? How did you manage the conference? [Grace] It was a bit of a test. I was only an hour from my home. So I had the backup of someone would come and get me and I had to run away if I needed to, but actually it worked really well. It was a bit of planning that was required. I had an electric wheelchair that reclined and the place I was staying was in wheelchair wheeling distance to the, to the conference center that. And the staff at the conference center were fantastic. I wouldn't. That, that couldn't have been planned, but that's the way it turned out. A woman, she told me that because she's short, she's used to not being able to reach things. And recognized that because I was in a chair, I couldn't reach some of the food at the lunch table. So she met me every day and helped me kind of dish a plate up for lunch. And yeah, she came up to me to suggest that. It wasn't. [Narelle] What other accommodations did you make to enable you to attend the conference? Was there much else? [Grace] I had a bit of communication with BX, it was a BX conference, beforehand about just understanding how it would run, was happening between the rooms so that I had an idea. And it wasn't. There wasn't a lot that I had to do differently. I didn't know how I would go out all day in the wheelchair because I had never tried that before. [Narelle] Yeah. [Grace] I've spent all of the time during the talks lying down in the wheelchair. And I didn't attend all of the conference. But I still was able to do more than I had been able to do before having that wheelchair and [Narelle] What about networking? Were you able to network well at the conference? Did the wheelchair inhibit you in any way from networking? [Grace] I don't think the wheelchair inhibited me. I, some of it was sitting down at tables. So I was the same height as people. I found, I met a lot of people that I had already met online and having that relationship already was really lovely to meet them in person. [Narelle] Yep. [Grace] I didn't spend as much time at the conference for networking. I think a lot of the, the evening things I didn't go to. So I was more interested in testing my capacity to attend something that took longer and listening to the speakers. The speakers were amazing and, but I did spend some time networking. [Narelle] So now you've done a conference like that. Do you think you'd go again? [Grace] Yeah, I think I would. And I'd be more confident doing it further away from home. I, yeah, not, knowing I've done the trial run, I would be able to do it

again. [Narelle] Yeah. Because you have to spend most of your time lying on your back, how do you get your clients? You know, do you still, obviously you're not very mobile. So what's the techniques that you use that would be different? Because you can't go to a lunch. Or [Grace] Well, I do go, I do go to some local networking. [Narelle] Yep. [Grace] I don't, yeah, I have some, some upright times that I call it. And I use that sometimes for local networking. I really wanted to connect in, there's online networking as well. But I really wanted to connect into my local community and meet some people face to face. So I do attend some local events. I'm in Ballina, Northern New South Wales. So we have a local networking group called Byron and Beyond. And they've been really supportive. And I've met some great people through that. But most of my clients I've got through, I suppose, introductions. So either I meet one person at a networking event like you and they introduced me to other people that I then meet digitally. [Narelle] Yeah. [Grace] And, yeah. [Narelle] So what do you do differently with your digital equipment with your computers? Do you use anything much different to what the normal person uses? [Grace] Well, I would have said no, but we were talking before and I realized that actually I do. I have a, a breadboard on my lap with an ergonomic keyboard and a trackball mouse sitting on top of my, that's a serving platter actually. [Narelle] That's Assistive Technology tool isn't it? [Grace] It is. And I actually used the, a matching serving platter to help modify the wheelchair. And I've got screens on monitor arms, which means that they can be positioned in a way that works for me, above me. [Narelle] Okay. So basically, if someone was lying on the bed and thinking about it, where you're like, I'm sitting up and looking at my screen, you're lying down and it's above you with arms connected to the monitor to bring it above you. And monitors, that what, connected to the roof or [Grace] No, I've got a, it's a bed desk, that the monitor arms attached to. [Narelle] Yes. So it is something, and you talked about the mouse that was slightly different, you said. [Grace] It's a trackball mouse. So when I used a standard mouse. on my, on my serving platter, if I took my hand off it, the mouse would roll down, down the angle of the, [Narelle] Yeah. [Grace] of the board. And so it would move to the bottom of my screen, which means if you want to then click on something else, you have to move it back up in it. Because yeah, trackball mice, the mouse is still, but there's a ball that rolls. So it doesn't roll if I take my hand off it. [Narelle] And what about the keyboard? You said there was something slightly different with the keyboard. [Grace] It's an ergonomic keyboard and they're designed. So they have an angle in the middle. So half the keys face on one angle and the other half face on the other angle. And that works better with my elbows resting on the couch. [Narelle] So you've really taken tools that are mainstream tool and adjusted them to make it fine for you. [Grace] Yeah, I created my setup on a disability pension before I had, before I had NDIS support. So everything was done on a budget and mostly, except for the trackball mouse, mostly from Kmart. [Narelle] And what about like even the desk itself? It's just the standard desk is it, or? [Grace] The desk came from Kmart. [Narelle] Oh, cool! That's interesting, isn't it? Because people often make assumptions that employing someone with disability requires major modification. [Grace] It's true that the most challenging part has been the ergonomic wedges for my back and for my legs. [Narelle] Yeah. [Grace] So that I don't end up with pressure, pressure pain. But those, again, it was just a little bit of trialing to see what worked for me. And they were not the ones I'm using right now. I think were \$60 each, so \$120 in total. It's not significant outlay. [Narelle] And your, you work an 8 hour a day. Well, actually, you're on your own, you own the business, you're probably working a lot more than

that. [Grace] I do sometimes, but I am totally, limited with my heart. I'm supposed to work four-hour a days. [Narelle] Oh, okay. [Grace] I work. Sorry. [Narelle] You're running a business on four-hours a day. So you're a very efficient, effective person. Because your business and let people know how many people you got employed for you. [Grace] We just have our sixth team member starting shortly, who is going to be a practice manager. And I'm very excited to have a practice manager come on board because running a business four-hours a day. It has been really hard. And I need help with that. So I often am not able to stop after four-hours. And when I don't stop after four hours, my health is compromised. So I'm looking forward to being able to hand over some of the admin tasks. [Narelle] You just, you're brilliant, Grace. And obviously I am a big fan of yours. Only because the ingenuity that you've used to adapt so that you can start your own business. What are the challenges you find with clients, if they realize that you have this disability? [Grace] I haven't had any actually. So I think one of the things about bookkeeping is it's an industry that's already set up for remote work. [Narelle] Yeah. [Grace] I've had I find the challenges, the challenges I have, the barriers to communication I have with clients are mostly either they're not confident in technology or the need to share information securely and cybersecurity practices. So for me, both are about education. So I can teach people how to use fairly simple software and we can create systems that work for them. Some, yeah, work with each client to find something that works for them that, that isn't too onerous with the cybersecurity. [Narelle] Yeah. [Grace] Because if, if the barrier is too big, if it feels like too much of a bother, they're not going to use the system. They're just going to e-mail things to me. And that, then they're putting themselves at risk with having their financial information be transmitted in an insecure the way. I feel like that's a bit of a theme in what we've been talking about previously. If you, if something is too hard to use or too hard to understand, you're not going to bother. So if you want to communicate your message, if you want to have people use your service, you make it as easy as possible. And that is all really what digital accessibility is about, isn't it? [Narelle] I think it's also recognizing that everyone's different. [Grace] Right. [Narelle] Everyone has a slightly different communication style. Like for me, I did park run this morning and, yeah, I did half the park run with my guide dog. But my sighted guide was ready so that, that I've got a my I've only had my guide dog for 8 months now And we're still trying to get him up to that speed and for the distance so that he can do it. And so when it hit that two and a half, 3K mark, it was he said, I'm done. And his communication style was I'll just go a bit slower. And so I knew and my sighted guide said, okay, take him off harness, he's on leash and I was on the tether. And we completed the park run. Did we do a PB? No, we didn't. Did that matter? No, because we still did the park run. And it's only 5K. And I, I still succeeded. I am. But I have to remember that right now until my guide dog is at that level where he can do the walk-jog walk-jog, which is what I like to do, that it's going to take time. And I just think anyone in when you do something new has that barrier. It's not a barrier, is it has that challenge. It doesn't matter what you're doing. You've got to learn how to do it. [Grace] Yeah, I suppose what I meant was if a screen reader is going to read your website out of order, all the information is still there. But are you really going to expect someone to try and piece that together? Or are they just going to give up? [Narelle] Good point. And also I've got to admit, lately I've giving up, because I just don't have time, Grace, I just need to get in, do what I need to do, and get out again. Now, whatever the application is, or, you know, I need that piece. One piece of information, I don't

want to spend half an hour trying to work out how the website's built. [Grace] Yes. [Narelle] Good point. I just, you know I move on. [Grace] Yeah. And it breaks my heart, like, having , having this business and having all these being able to do so much through the digital world has opened up so much for me. And it breaks my heart that it's not accessible to everyone. I think I always thought of the internet as universal. Obviously, you need to have the economic means to have a mobile or computer to access it. But I didn't realize how limited it was for people that use Assistive Technology. And it should be there for everyone. It should and particularly people that are isolated in different ways that can could communicate and could access things digitally. [Narelle] Well, I think that's one of the things I always think about with you, Grace. You talked earlier in the piece where you were very isolated. You were in your room, you're very isolated. You weren't meeting people. And then you got that impetus. And you had the reason. And you knew what you wanted to do. And in a space of two and a half years, you've changed your whole life. So now, I say, oh, have you spoken to Grace Cameron. And someone's like, oh, no, I've got to go and speak to Grace. She'll know about whatever it is. And now you're getting the name for knowing about, you know, the particular types of challenges that you take on with bookkeeping. And to me, you having POTS is the sideline. Your main thing is your a darn good bookkeeper, you take on those challenging bookwork where, you know, there's issues, whatever it is. And you sort it out and get them back on, get the business back on course or aid the businesses to get back on course. And that's the other thing. I think hiring a person with disability, we are problem solvers, aren't we? [Grace] Right. And we have an understanding of of other people having challenges. And I think I take that for me. One of my passions is when I speak to business owners. I want them to understand their business. I want them to understand what the numbers are doing. I want them to see their business changing as it's changing. So they can act early. If the expenses are going up and profit margins are shrinking, you want to recognize that early so that you've got time to plan. Rather than when change hits you in the face and you have to react. And, but most people aren't really into numbers and data. And so working out how I can communicate with each client, what, what they need to understand those things. That, that is the most exciting thing for me. And I think also, maybe the most powerful thing for my clients being able to use that. Whether they're numbers people or not. Or whether they like graphs. [Narelle] If you're looking at their method of communication and the way they feel the most comfortable to get the message. [Grace] Yeah. And trying to work together. We don't always get it it takes time to get it right. But then when we I, we know we can create a template really for that that client to keep each month communicating that the change that we can see in the data. [Narelle] Grace. What would you say to any person with disability, about finding work or starting a business. What's the one tip or idea that you would say to help them break out of that isolation? [Grace] There's two tips actually. And they're not just for people with disability. I think these tips are for anyone. The first one is to think of continuous improvement rather than perfectionism. So if you're looking for something that's perfect it's really hard to start. But if you can just start on something small and know that you'll improve it over time, it's much easier to get started. And the other one that I used in my business, my, my business coach actually said it to me early on. And it's been brilliant. When you have a piece of advice, instead of thinking I can't do that because of this, I can't do that because that requires me to go out of the house and go see people face-to-face. I think I like, I like the concept. So how can I make that work for me and take out parts

that, parts of that concept? And so an example is accountant meetings. Often people suggest to bookkeepers go knock on the doors of all of the accountants in your neighbourhood and introduce yourself and set up meetings with them. That doesn't work for me. But I can do it digitally. So yeah. [Narelle] Grace. Thanks. I, I think you've got such a powerful message to give across and I appreciate your time today. I really do. And just sitting here and looking at what you've done the last two and a half years. Oh yeah. Congratulations, Grace. [Grace] Thank you. [Narelle] You know, you are an exciting person to sit back and watch, to see where your journey takes you. So [Grace] I've had a lot of help. And I Yeah. I've had a lot of fantastic advice and I think it just came back to doing small changes, trying to do a small change each week or trying to implement something in a way that works for me regularly. And not having perfect as the goal, but having improvement as the goal. [Narelle] Thanks Grace. Thanks so much for your time today. So Grace, how can people contact you? [Grace] Well, Sunlight Bookkeeping is my business. And our phone number is 02 6685 7558. Or you can email me at grace@sunlightbookkeeping.com.au. [Narelle] Now, if you want a great bookkeeper, talk to Grace. If you want inspiration and understanding that there's no such thing as a barrier. It's a challenge and a challenge is able to be met. Not sometimes the way you would think, because let's face it, Grace has just done a podcast, lying on her back, on Clover, according to the screen. And she's done it with a laugh. And yeah, Grace is a perf, Grace is the one to meet. If you ever get the chance, meet Grace Cameron. [Grace] Thank you Narelle. [Narelle] And thanks everyone. See you next episode of The Digital Access Show. [Grace] Thank you, Narelle. [Music]