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[Narelle] Hi, and welcome  
to our latest episode

of the Digital Access Show,

where we talk all  
things, communication,

digital accessibility,

limitations,  
barriers, disability,

you name it.

This week again,

and we've looked at perceptions  
for the last three weeks,

and we're looking  
at it again this week,

but again from a  
different point of view.

So initially we had Allan Parker  
talking about the science,

the brain and what  
perceptions are.

We had Mark Warren...

talking from his point of  
view about employment

and the way people...

perceive Mark.

We've had Peter Archer  
from BeyondVision,

talking again about...

what he does and the barriers.

This week, we're coming from  
a different point of view again.

Our guest this week is working  
for the Disability Gateway,

and he's actually getting  
ready to branch out on his own.

So please meet Aaron Orme.

Aaron, thank you so  
much for coming on.

[Aaron] It's a pleasure,  
Narelle. Thanks for having me.

[Narelle] Aaron, can you tell  
us a bit about yourself, please?

[Aaron] Yeah, sure. So...

I...

I am totally blind now.

I lost my side through  
retinitis pigmentosa.

For many years,

I had central  
vision, wore glasses.

Just didn't have any peripheral.

Then would be...

four years ago now,

it just slowly faded  
till it just disappeared.

I was working for the state  
government at the time.

I had to, I had to leave  
that employment, because...

the role I was doing,

well, it, with all the  
accessibility in the world,

Narelle, I still don't  
think I could have done it.

[Narelle] Okay.

[Aaron] Using  
systems such as SAP.

[Narelle] Ah, yes.

[Aaron] Yes. So, it was  
very financial orientated,

and...

it, I just, I just  
couldn't do it.

And I mean, I did go into a,

you know, a bad space  
there for a little while.

Then one day,  
I thought, you know what?

What are you going to  
do for the rest of your life?

So that's when I met...

met Mark, Mark Muscat.

-[Aaron] Your...

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Narelle] CEO. Yep.

-[Aaron] CEO. And...

Mark got, introduced me to JAWS,

and I did a traineeship  
through Vision Australia,

because I felt that I  
had to prove to myself

before I could prove  
to anybody else

that I was employable  
as a blind person,

because it was all new to me.

Managed to wade my through that,  
weighed my way through that.

Had never touched JAWS,  
told them I was an expert at it,

so really put Mark  
under pressure there

to keep me up to  
speed within two weeks.

-[Aaron] Which we did.

-[Narelle Yeah.

[Aaron] Then, after I  
had done the traineeship,

I landed a role with Quality  
Innovation Performance.

They were an NDIS  
certified accreditation body.

So I was,

I guess, the person who  
made sure that the auditors

and the providers played  
nice with each other,

That was with audits. And then...

organise the auditors,  
and yeah, I was the...

the person in the middle to  
make sure it all came together.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] Did that for...

you know, about  
eight or nine months.

And then the role came up  
with the Disability Gateway,

which was a work from home role.

[Narelle] Nice.

[Aaron] Remote working.

The office, the head  
office is in Sydney,

so being based in Brisbane, I...

don't have to worry  
about going to the office.

And look, they were,  
they were fantastic.

We discussed the  
fact of accessibility,

and they again, did a  
lot of work with Mark,

around testing their  
systems prior to my starting,

and to see what needed  
adjustments would be needed.

They never put the  
barrier up that I wasn't,

wasn't going to get the job.

They wanted to make sure  
that they weren't setting me up

to fail for something  
that they could change.

-[Aaron] So they were fantastic.

-[Narelle] Oh, wow.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] Things like on-boarding,

which usually goes for two  
weeks. mine went for four.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Aaron] Because  
we had to, you know,

tackle some barriers as they  
showed up during that time.

And I've been with  
them for two years.

-[Narelle] Yep.

-[Aaron] And,

look, I'm at the  
stage now where...

I feel the change is needed.

I can see a gap out  
there in the market

for, you know, I'm going  
to be looking at doing...

support coordination,

and then looking at registering  
into the plan management arena.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Aaron] But I feel that  
there's a need out there

for people that can understand,

as the provider, what the  
participant is going through.

-[Aaron] Not just...

-[Narelle] Yeah.

Being there to  
bill the participant.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Aaron] It ties in a lot with  
the work that I have been doing

over the past two years at the,  
at the Disability Gateway.

So yes, it's interesting,  
interesting times are here.

[Narelle] I find it interesting.

Like you talked about  
the Benevolent Society and...

the way they went  
out of their way

to make sure you could  
continue to do your job.

So the perception  
that you had was that...

you could do the job,

and the perception they  
had was yeah, you can do it,

with a couple of adjustments.

Is that correct  
from what you said?

[Aaron] Yeah,  
correct. First off,

there was a couple of times they  
thought you won't be able to,

you know, our SharePoint  
won't be accessible.

And that was, that was  
making an assumption.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Narelle] And look, it  
was with the backing, a lot of,

Mark had to put in quite a bit  
of fight there at some points.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] And it  
was about proving.

So,

they did tell me,  
when I started, that...

I guess I was...

to be like a test case.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Aaron] To see...

to see what was and  
what wasn't accessible.

And 'cause, as we're aware,

the one thing that can happen,  
and it happens many times,

is, as you mentioned,  
perception and assumption.

People make the  
assumption for you

that something can't be done.

You know, people make  
the assumption, or perceive,

why would you be looking  
at starting your own business?

You're a blind person, you're  
a person with a disability.

So what? I'm a person.

And...

I can do it.

I can do it along  
with anybody else.

[Narelle] I think the  
assumption there is,

that you could sit on the  
disability pension for life.

[Aaron] Yeah. Yeah.

And look, some people do.

Some people are  
quite happy to do that.

But that's not,  
that's not for me.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] There  
will be challenges.

There will be a  
lot of challenges.

There has been  
challenges so far.

But I always look at  
something and just, you know,  
don't...

let it get to you.

Work out how you going  
to have to get over it.

And look, you know,

hey, I've got some  
great supports around me

that I can say to somebody,

I need your eyes.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] This form  
is not accessible.

Or I'll ring places and  
they'll say, oh, yes, well,

you just need to fill the  
form out, and I'll say no.

Your form's not accessible,

and I actually need  
you to do it for me.

[Narelle] Yeah.

So, um,

it has been,

it's been challenging, and there

will be more challenges to come.

One of the challenges I'm facing  
is starting my registration...

through the commission.

-[Narelle] Yep.

-[Aaron] In the fact that...

I can't prove my identity 'cause  
I don't have a driver's license.

[Narelle] My gosh, they didn't  
ask you for a driver's license.

[Aaron] The Proda.

I don't have sufficient  
identification for Proda,

because I don't have a passport.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] I, the options  
were Medicare card,

Australian driver's  
license, immigration card.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Aaron] Or...

[Aaron] Australian passport.

[Narelle] Oh my gosh.

[Aaron] So I've had to...

have my support worker  
this morning assist me...

in completing the  
manual identification form,

having to scan  
all the documents,

email them through  
the Commission,

which will now take  
them time to process that,

to then enable me to log in,

to then commence  
the registration process,

which I don't know what that's  
going to then entail there.

So...

[Narelle] Do you  
think that's perception

on the part of the NDIS,

that a person...

with a disability would  
still run a business?

Is that perception behind it,  
you think? Is that the belief?

[Aaron] I think  
it is, but I, it...

Mark's belief with  
me that, that would,

that would be it, because  
when we think about...

the whole concept of the NDIS,

is to, is to help people to...

you know, to lead a,

in their terms, normal life.

And to me,

that means that,

if someone chooses to be  
employed, they can be employed.

If someone chooses  
to do a business,

then there shouldn't be barriers  
to stop them doing that.

And yet,

an organisation such as this...

puts these barriers in.

And I know that...

that your organisation finds  
these things all the time,

finds...

websites and forms that,

that they aren't accessible.

I mean, another one...

was when I applied  
for Job Access funding.

And I was told that I  
had to apply online,

and the online form  
is not accessible.

I rang them.

They said we know that,

so we'll do it over  
the phone for you.

I said, well, are you  
going to fix the form?

We're just doing it over  
the phone for your group.

And when you think about  
the concept why Job Access...

is there,

it's to...

provide assistance to  
people with a disability

to gain and maintain  
employment, and yet...

the form that you  
need to fill in to,

to get the funding to  
do so is inaccessible.

[Narelle] I'm just  
already blown away.

What, we're two minutes into it,

and two major,

one I knew about,  
but one I didn't.

[Aaron] Yeah, yeah.  
No, I've, I've spoken...

I actually spoke with  
with Mark about that.

And Mark actually  
tried himself too to do it.

And it's a simple  
thing, Narelle.

It is that the drop-down  
boxes don't talk.

Don't know what the technical terminology for that is, but...

[Narelle] They're just missing one attribute, basically.

-[Narelle] One characteristic.

-[Aaron] Yeah.

[Aaron] I tried to use the old, okay,

well, if they've gone alphabetical, if I,

if I press it down arrow, so many times,

I should get to Queensland, no.

It doesn't tell you then what you've even got to.

So...

Yeah, and they admitted themselves, it's not accessible.

And yet that was a new,

a new system that they had brought in because the, the top...

the first lot of funding that it went for two years ago,

it was over the phone.

There wasn't an online, so it is a new a new process that,

obviously,

they again perceived that it was accessible,

made the assumption that it was accessible,

and probably tested it.

But as we've spoken  
about ourselves,

there's one thing in in testing  
it with screen reader software,

if you can see the screen,

then it does appear  
to be accessible.

But if you have  
somebody do the testing

who doesn't have the sight,

they will find those  
parts that break.

[Narelle] It's  
interesting, isn't it?

Because it really  
comes down to people's...

perceptions and ideas.

One of my close friends used  
to work federal government,

in the IT section, and he was,

I can't even remember  
what he was testing,

and he put a blindfold  
on, and they stirred him.

And he said, well

I'm testing it like a person  
with a vision impairment would.

It's gotta be tested that way.

He was telling me the story,  
and I said, what happened?

He said, I just sent it back and  
said, this is not accessible.

He said, I just  
refused to pass it.

And he said, and he  
admitted he struggled.

And he said, the  
problem comes back to...

the testing is not  
adequate for the purpose.

[Aaron] Yeah. Exactly, exactly.

You know,

the best person to test it is  
the person you tailor it for.

[Narelle] What other  
barriers do you find, Aaron?

I mean, we've talked about the  
simple one of applying online,

you know, to get access and not,

because I have a passport so I'm  
a little bit better than you.

But the passport is a document,

and trying to read that document  
when you haven't got vision,

and yeah, we do have tools

that can read some of it,

but that's if it's even...

built properly,

that you know  
what you're hearing,

[Aaron] And that's right.  
And then knowing that,

knowing that the result that  
you get is the actual result.

And it's not just,

you know,

reading it the way  
that it wants to read it.

-[Aaron] Yeah, that's a big one.  
-[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] Filling in,  
filling in forms.

A lot of...

referrals that we would have to  
do, from the Disability Gateway,

was using forms that  
were inaccessible.

[Narelle] Yeah.

I just have to gather the  
information from the clients,

and I would have to get somebody  
else to do the form for me.

[Narelle] It's very  
disabling, isn't it?

[Aaron] It is. It is.

And again, it's...

places that design the forms,

making the assumptions that  
they're going to be accessible.

I was very upfront  
too with clients.

When I spoke to clients,  
I used to always say to people,

I'd let the person  
on the end of the...

phone know that they're speaking  
to someone with a disability,

purely from the aspect of...

when they're reading out their  
phone number to me and JAWS...

suddenly talks in the middle of  
them giving me their number,

I have to ask them to repeat it.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] I didn't want to come  
across as not listening to them,

that I wasn't taking an interest  
in what they were telling me.

And, you know,

I found that a lot of times that  
it actually opened people up.

Because...

again, perception.

Oh, there's actually someone  
works at the Disability gateway

who has a disability.

It's as if, you know,

we don't work.

Because I believe that...

it is a...

hidden number when they, when  
they talk about unemployment,

because people on  
the disability support...

are not considered

to be unemployed,

because they're not, they're  
not on the unemployment benefit,

and they're not  
registered as seeking work.

So,

look, yeah, I got a lot of,  
a lot of that from clients

when I when I would tell them,  
a lot of them were shocked that...

I was able to do the job,

because people just  
don't understand that.

And technology has  
come a long way,

and it's always evolving.

I actually listened to  
a podcast with the...

CEO of...

Be My Eyes, and...

the gentleman, Jonathan Mosen.

And I liked how he put it,

that what we had today is  
the worst it's ever going to be.

The way that technology  
is moving forward.

[Narelle] And this is it.

I was listening to Mark  
Muscat in a webinar we did,

it was a conference, actually,  
and he was talking about where...

digital accessibility has  
come from to where it is now.

And you know, in  
the space of 30 years,

the difference is huge.

-[Aaron] In a couple of years.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Narelle] Well, it is.

I, one of my aunts.

She had a scarlet  
fever as a baby,

I can't remember, that my aunt  
had a severe vision impairment.

And back then,

was cooking on a wood stove.

She had to make  
all the kids clothes,

you know, cut the wood,  
cook the food, do the housework.

And my aunt managed it with  
a severe vision impairment.

What I remember of my  
aunt was she had no sight,

or very little sight  
when I knew her,

and she just managed.

Because you didn't not manage.

You just did, where today,

the perception is...

how do you do it?

Yeah, and like, I get  
that, oh, you're inspiring.

I'm not, actually.  
I'm just living my life.

But even when people  
say you're inspiring,

that can be a barrier,

because...

it can create a well,

why should I do it?

You know,

would it be easier?

I don't know about you,

just some days, it'd be so much  
easier if I sat in my corner

and listen to the cricket.

[Aaron] Well,

that's true. That's true.

And...

you know, it's tiresome.

As I, as I say to  
some people, like,

a simple task of, um,

you know,

sending an email for people...

takes longer.

And your mind is  
constantly thinking,

Simple tasks, for example,  
me to get out of this chair

to go through to the kitchen,  
to grab a glass of water.

I'm thinking the whole  
way I'm, I'm moving,

about where am I spatially?

Where's the, where's the bench?

Where is this? Where is that?

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] And it can  
be very, very tiresome.

At the end of the day, you just  
feel like, you know, collapsed.

[Narelle] Yeah. I know for me,

like for me to walk to the  
chemist, it's about 800 meters.

Okay, if I, if I had good sight,

for me,

by the time I walk  
there and I walk back,

it's nearly four and  
a half kilometres,

because of the way I've got to  
walk to be able to do it safely,

across the road safely.

And I'm talking about one of  
the major roads in Brisbane

that I have to cross.

And I'm talking  
about electric vehicles,

and being aware  
of electric vehicles,

being aware of scooters,  
the electric scooters,

you just, you know,  
all of those little things.

And I get back and all I want  
to do is sit for half an hour.

-[Narelle] I am mentally tired.

-[Aaron] Yeah.

[Narelle] Not physically.

I'm mentally tired.

[Aaron] Yep. Yeah.

[Narelle] And again,  
it's all perceptions.

You know, they say, you walk

to the chemist. Well, I can.

It's not the  
physical aspect of it,

it's the mental aspect of it.

[Aaron] That's exactly it.  
That's exactly it, yep.

[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Narelle] It's that idea,  
-[Aaron] Yeah.

And, but it's in  
everything that we do.

One of the, I've got a  
cousin that has, she's autistic.

I think she's wonderful.

She was probably spoiled as a  
kid. She's much older than me.

And I know my  
uncles spoiled her,

because it was  
always I'll call Franny.

And I look at Fran,  
Fran's had a great life.

Do I love Fran?  
I absolutely adore Fran.

Do I want to live with Fran?

No!

Does Fran would live with me?

No.

Us having a disability doesn't  
mean we don't have a great life.

[Aaron] For sure. Exactly, yeah.

Yeah. Yeah.

-[Aaron] Yeah. Um...

-[Narelle] What...

If you can't see, it doesn't  
mean you don't go on holiday.

[Narelle] Yeah!

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Aaron] Yeah.

[Aaron] We experience  
different things.

[Narelle] Yeah.

What do you think  
are the strengths...

that a person with,  
or that you bring,

I'll focus on you.

What do you think  
are the strengths...

that you bring...

to anything, Aaron?

[Aaron] I guess it's...

empathy and understanding,

and patience.

You learn to be  
a lot more patient.

And but also understanding that,

yes,

sometimes,

the world can't change for you.

There is some things that,

with all the  
adaption in the world,

I'm not going to be  
able to drive a car,

you know?

-[Aaron] Why...

-[Narelle] Yeah.

Why should I expect  
them to change the wheel

so that I can drive  
a car, when, when,

that's not a reality.

So I think it's also about...

us also being  
realistic at times too,

and understanding  
your barriers, and...

you, you tend to learn how to  
think outside of the box a lot,

and look at things from  
a, from a different way.

You know?

Having to, how am I  
going to be able to do this?

You know, what can I, what can I  
implement to be able to do this?

So...

I think those are the strengths that that I can bring.

[Narelle] Do you see...

the barriers as a barrier,

or do you see it as a challenge?

Do you see it as a negative?

Do you see it as positive?

[Aaron] I...

I guess...

it's a challenge.

I never see them as a...

barrier.

Because, you know,

that's an interesting question that you raised there.

Very interesting.

I always look at, try to look on the positive,

because if you dwell too much on the negative,

you're never going to be able to overcome that barrier anyway.

One of my favourite questions when I ever go a job interview...

is...

have you met a change?

And I just say, wow,

where do we start?

You know, I went from...

being a fully sighted person,

driving a car,

to suddenly overnight being told  
that I was losing my vision,

to then...

losing it completely.

So...

I've adapted to change all the  
way throughout my whole life.

And...

I could have easily,  
as we mentioned before,

sat in the corner  
and said, woe is me.

But I decided to  
brush myself off,

look on the positive side of it,

and...

you know, work out...

in working with people, um,

you know, Mark Muscat being one  
of them, yourself being another,

on how to overcome  
some of these barriers.

And to understand,

as we explained,  
that some of them,  
they can't be overcome,  
but is there a  
different way to do it?

[Narelle] And I  
think I'm with you.

One of the...

things that I  
always get asked is,

you know, are you enjoying life?

Would you change your sight?

And that's a common  
one, you know?

Would you go and have...

You can't fix my sight.

Do I want to fix my  
sight? Actually, I don't.

And the reason I don't is,

I have met,

for me, it's about 17 years  
since I started losing my sight,

and it's...

three years, two and a half,

three years since I  
lost all functional sight.

And do you know what?

I have learnt so much,  
and I've met so many inspiring...  
people that I would  
never have met,  
if I'd still had my sight.

I would have been going along,  
doing the same old, same old.

[Aaron] I don't know.

I used to read,  
in, you know, in groups  
where people would say that...

when they finally left,  
lost their sight,  
there was a sense of relief.

I used to think they were crazy.

-[Aaron] But then it happened.  
-[Narelle] No.

[Aaron] I understood it.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] Because you got it,  
got to a point there where...

the vision that I had was  
more of a hindrance than a help.

People didn't see me as blind.

-[Aaron] I had some vision.  
-[Narelle] Yep.

[Aaron] But I didn't have enough  
that I was, that it was really...

any use to, not so  
much any use to me, but...

that I could use in a way that  
was really productive, I guess.

So when it finally,  
finally happened,

I understood...

what they meant.

Again, would I change it?

Oh, yes. Can it be  
changed? No, mine's,

again, mine's one as well that...

-[Aaron] Can't be changed.

-[Narelle] Yep.

[Aaron] And then to add to it,

I now have a hearing  
impairment as well.

So...

so four years ago,

I had to start  
wearing hearing aids.

So...

that's just something else that,

that you know, that's  
been put in the way, but...

then what do you do?

You can either sit in the  
corner and dwell on that,

or you can,

you can move on,  
and I've chosen,

I've chosen to move on.

[Narelle] Yeah.

I always laugh and say,

what's the words I use?

I've probably got more speeding  
tickets than a lot of people.

They go, what do you mean?

And I'll say, I was a fool.

I loved cars.

-[Narelle] I still love cars.

-[Aaron] Yeah.

[Narelle] And boy, did I  
have a few speeding tickets.

My parents didn't know.

Once I lost all  
functional sight,

I finally got game enough  
and said, yeah, mum.

Had a few. Where  
would you like me to start?

And she goes, what do  
you mean? I said, yeah.

Had a few speeding tickets.

Paid them all.

Didn't tell you.  
She said, well, why not?

I thought, yeah,  
because I was scared.

[Narelle laughs]

At my age, you never told your  
mum you had speeding tickets.

And people look at  
you and say, you drive?

You actually drove? And  
say, Yeah, I actually did.

Drove my kids to sports,  
did the shopping.

I lived life.

I'm still living life.  
I'm still doing it.

And I'm having a  
ball, because, seriously,

I wouldn't have met  
people like you, Aaron.

People like Steve Richardson,  
Paul Price, Mark Muscat.

Anne Marie Colton,  
Christopher [XXX].

There's so many people...

I would have never have met,  
if I hadn't lost my sight.

Ann Hislop.

And it's been a gift  
in so many ways.

Yeah, there's bad things,

but again, it's people's  
perceptions, isn't it?

[Aaron] It is. It is.

And of course, one  
of the big ones,

which is making the rounds  
at the moment of perception is...

of what...

the, the NDIA perceive  
we need as support.

-[Aaron] That is...

-[Narelle] Yeah.

That is becoming a  
big one that we're,

I guess, we're all having  
to, to face moving forward.

And, you know, it...

it's then an option to look...

and you have to that deep dive,

and you have to,  
I guess, admit to things...

that you can't do, and...

you know, that's not what  
a person should have to do...

to move forward.

But that's what  
they want us to do.

-[Aaron] So...

-[Narelle] It is.

[Narelle] It is a

disabling process.

-[Narelle] There's no doubt.

-[Aaron] Yes.

-[Aaron] Yes.

-[Narelle] Aaron,

with everything  
we've talked about,

what's one...

two points...

two takeaways that you can give  
to people that are listening?

[Aaron] Don't assume.

Ask the questions.

I, I tell people,  
ask me anything.

I am very really  
not easily offended.

So you can ask me,

ask me any question.

I'll answer it.

Just don't assume  
and make assumptions...

on what you think  
I can or can't do.

Let me try it.

-[Aaron] If I fail, I fail.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

[Aaron] But that's through  
my choosing to do that.

It's not by you  
stopping me from doing that.

[Narelle] Aaron, thank you.

Thank you so much  
for taking the time.

-[Narelle] Talking to us.  
-[Aaron] Thanks for having me.

[Narelle] Aaron, how  
can people contact you

if they want to keep  
the conversation going,

and find out more  
about your journey,

and where you're going?

[Aaron] Well, I'm currently in  
the process of organising that,

Narelle, so what  
I can say is that,

I've got the business name.

It's going to be called Vision  
Management and Coordination.

So, keep an eye out  
on your socials for that.

Just organising to  
getting the website done,

and then I'll be able to  
do more social profiles.

And...

you know, be out there  
talking to people, and...

and, and helping

those participants

because I understand  
what it is that they're...

they're, they're looking for.

You know?

Using the knowledge that I've  
gained during this, Narelle,

to help to...

to help others to  
move forward, and...

to get value for the service  
that they're being given

not just somebody wanting  
to bill you for talking to you.

-[Aaron] So...

-[Narelle] And also...

the fact that you  
understand the barriers.

You should lift the barriers.

[Aaron] Yep. Yes.

Yep.

[Narelle] Again, thanks, Aaron.

Look, if you like...

what we do, what we talk about,

please like, share,

subscribe, review.

Give us feedback.

We really do love feedback.

We want to know  
what you're thinking.

Are we covering the subjects  
that you're interested in?

And I'll actually, if you  
want to contact Aaron,

definitely email us and we can  
put you in contact with Aaron,

until he's ready...

to add his information.

So I'm Narelle,  
and I'll see you next week.

Bye, bye.

{\an8}[music playing]