

[music playing]

[Narelle] Good morning,

and welcome to this episode  
of the Digital Access Show,

where we focus on communication,

accessibility, digital  
accessibility in particular,

and disability.

What is the link  
between the three?

Interaction.

Communication provides an  
interaction between people.

People with disability often  
have problems with communication

because the digital  
content is not built for this.

Now, my guest today is  
a lady with the difference,

and I am really excited  
to have her on the show.

What's the difference?

Well, this is Shiralee's  
first time she's on a podcast.

So ladies and gentlemen,  
please meet Shiralee McKitrick.

Shiralee, thank you  
so much coming on.

[Shiralee] Thank  
you for having me.

I'm really excited to be here.

[Narelle] Shiralee,

can you tell us a bit about  
yourself and your family?

[Shiralee] Yeah.

I have, I have two boys.

They're teenagers now,

and our disability is  
quite a hodgepodge.

We have chromosomal deletions.

So basically, we have  
our chromosomes,

and I like to explain  
it as a library.

Each chromosome is  
a library, and it teaches...

it teaches your body  
how to build things,

brains, eyes, body parts.

Our library is incomplete.

So in that library,  
we're missing books,

and because we're missing books,

our bodies did not  
make things in our brains

that we need to function.

My boys are missing 12 books

that makes it sometimes  
difficult to live their lives,

and I'm missing 27 books.

So that makes it more  
difficult to live our lives.

So we've got things  
like autism and ADHD.

We also have, um,

hypermobility, joint problems,

heart problems, eye problems,

you name it,

because...

the, the books weren't there.

The books weren't there to,  
um, build the bits that we need.

[Narelle] Shiralee, how  
do they diagnose that?

That's really interesting.

[Shiralee] Yes.

What happened was, is  
when I had my first son,

he had a difficult birth.

They thought that his problems  
were due to a difficult birth.

And I did ask them if  
it was chromosomal,

and they said, no,  
it's a difficult birth.

And I was like, okay, so I had  
my second son straight after,

And he had the same problems.

And they were like,  
this doesn't look right.

And when I went to  
physiotherapy with them,

they said, we think they've  
got Ehlers-Danlos syndrome.

And I said, oh, how  
do you test for that?

And they said, oh, well,  
you need to do a DNA test.

And so we did the DNA test.

And they came back,

and they said, you don't  
have Ehlers-Danlos syndrome,

but you do have something.

And I'm like, Oh, what is it?

And they said, Well,  
you get to name it.

-[Shiralee] Because...

-[Narelle] What?

[Shiralee] Yeah, they put all  
the deletions into the world,

the worldwide data bank,

and usually that will, that  
will spit out a syndrome.

Of chromosome or deletions.

There is no,

nobody else in  
the world has our...

specific set of  
chromosomal deletions.

My set, or the boys' set,

because they had

to test us as well

to make sure that it

was a familiar thing

and not just an environmental

thing that just popped up.

So we've been walking

down the road of...

working out why things

happen when things happen.

Is it a chromosomal thing?

Is it an environmental thing?

They can't tell us anything...

about anything,

life expectancy and

all that kind of stuff.

It's just based on our familiar



patterns, which is normal.

And so we just truck  
along as we truck along.

And when things pop up, we just...

deal with them as  
they come along.

So there's a lot of  
physical problems,

which you can't see.

Boys needed braces  
and jaw realignments,

because our brain's...

chromosomes didn't know  
how to make our faces properly.

So there's hearing  
problems as well,

which you can't see because  
it's all in, inside the brain.

From what we can gather,

it's mainly in the  
face and the brain,

as well as hypermobility  
and, um, low collagen,

which makes us  
very stretchy and, um,

prone to fall down  
a lot if we're tired.

[Shiralee laughs]

[Narelle] Okay, this is  
getting really interesting,

because you have a background  
in science as well, don't you?

[Shiralee] I do.

I do. It's one of  
my hyper fixations.

I do like it. I didn't do  
a lot about genetics, though,

but I, I do have  
a science degree,

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] And so this is  
all very fascinating for me.

It does help a little bit  
with trying to explain things,

like the library's,

the library with books.

You know, if you don't  
have the book, you...

can't make the thing.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] You know?

[Shiralee] It seems to make it  
easier to explain to people.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] But yeah.

Um, I,

yeah, just because I don't  
have the books in my brain,

doesn't mean that people  
can't do science degrees.

My eldest is actually  
looking to go to university

to do computer...

programming.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Shiralee] Which...

is exciting,

because, yeah, when he was  
first diagnosed with everything,

they said he wouldn't  
even live really,

he'd be a vegetable.

-[Narelle] My gosh.

-[Shiralee] They...

They told me to don't  
worry about the therapies.

Don't worry about  
anything. Just...

love him as he is,  
kind of thing. And...

they suggested that I  
needed psychiatric support

because the first  
time they told me that,

I looked at him and said, this  
boy's going to go to university.

And they said, this...

boy can't even hold  
his head up at three.

You know, he can't even  
hold his own body weight.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] What do you mean?

You know, he hasn't even made  
a noise, um, of any description.

[Shiralee laughs] What do you  
mean he's going to university?

[Narelle] Yeah.

And I said, yeah, he's  
going to go to the university.

And yeah, he has a normal IQ.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Shiralee] You couldn't  
pick him out in the crowd,

besides the fact that  
his voice is a little muffled

because of his  
auditory processing,

everything is muffled to  
him, so that's how he speaks,

um, which does make  
people think that he's...

not always all there,

but he has a higher  
vocabulary than most...

teenagers of his age.

-[Narelle] And he's 16 or 17?

-[Shiralee] So...

[Shiralee] Um, he's 16,  
turning 17.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] My youngest is 15,

turning 16.

He was diagnosed with autism

when he was two,

which is, well,

actually 18 months,

but that which is quite unusual,

but he was so classic...

that they just went, yeah.

And the way I found out  
about him was actually,

his eldest went to  
a special daycare,

and, and he would  
come with and they went,

would you like to bring  
him in for daycare as well?

And I was like, why?



Because when your  
firstborn is different,

you don't know what's  
normal and what's not normal.

[Narelle] Yeah, that's true.

[Shiralee] No reason,  
no reason. Would you just like...

to bring him in?

And I'm like, Yeah, sure.

And yeah.

He's diagnosed with  
the highest level of autism,

they do the scales now.

So the social, the interactive,

the daily living, the...

his is off the charts.

Absolutely off the charts.

But he is a very  
articulate, social,

bubbly, he's got a  
huge group of friends.

You could not pick him out...

in a, in a lineup.

In fact, the government tried.

[Shiralee laughs]

[Narelle] What happened?

Tell me this.

[Shiralee laughs]

When he was younger,

they had a thing down  
here where they wanted, um,

people with disabilities,

more support in the schools.

So they were bringing out  
what's called the Gowan act,

and they wanted  
to do a big PR thing,

and they wanted, they selected...

his school,

and they asked, they said, oh,  
we need the most disabled child,

because we want to  
do this big PR thing,

about how disabled  
children can get into schools.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] They were like,

he's exactly who you want.

You want,

you want my child,

because he's so, like,  
top of the chart for autism.

I mean, you know, never met  
another autistic child like him,

And they're like, oh, brilliant.

Bring him here, we'll come down.

They came down  
with their cameras,

and like, the  
politicians were there.

[Narelle] Even the politicians?

[Shiralee] Even the politicians.

They wanted this,

it was going to be  
in the papers, in the,

you know, online, on  
the news kind of thing.

They all came down,

and it was a school assembly.

And they were searching  
for the wheelchairs,

they were searching  
for, the the canes

and the teacher's aides  
and all this kind of stuff.

They're like, where is he?

And they said,  
we'll bring him up to you.

I got him.

And here's my  
child bopping along.

And he put out his  
hand, and he's like, hi.

You're looking for me?

And they were like...

we need the disabled child.

[Narelle laughs]

And I went...

he's the most disabled  
child in our school.

And they went...

No, no, we wanted  
a disabled child.

And he's like, yeah, that's me.

And he rattled  
off all these things,

and he's like, I hear  
you want to interview me.

I'm really excited about it,  
and they were like, no.

-[Shiralee] They left.

-[Narelle] They refused?

[Narelle] Left, and  
left him hanging?

-[Shiralee] And they left.

-[Narelle] Oh my gosh.

[Shiralee] They went to another  
school with somebody else,

[Narelle] My gosh.

[Narelle] What was the  
effect on your son then?

[Shiralee] He thought  
it was funny as heck.

-[Narelle] I bet.

-[Shiralee] He was like...

[Shiralee] Yeah, no bruise  
to his ego whatsoever.

-[Shiralee] He was confused.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] He was like, but...

-[Narelle] Yeah.

I thought they wanted,

because they thought, he  
thought they wanted him for him.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] Because  
in our family,

nobody's disabled.

This is our family,

and so they've got no concept...

of anything else.

-[Narelle] Yes.

-[Shiralee] And so,

for people to pick him  
out for his disability,



it's just a foreign  
concept to him,

because he's just like,  
well, they want me for me.

They don't want me for my  
disability, because everybody's...

you know, got their own issues.

And whilst other people  
might not have as many as us,

I mean, everybody's  
got a preference for cars.

Everybody has a  
preference tying their shoes.

Everybody's got a preference  
for how they get from A to B,

whether it's a wheelchair,  
or it's a car,

whether it's walking,  
whether it's...

But he's got their preferences.

And so he didn't understand,

and he didn't care,

but he was just like, oh.

They're going to go find  
somebody else to talk to

that maybe has their preference.

You know,

I wasn't their preference.

So they're going to go  
and find somebody who is...

the right preference.

Because that's how  
we are in this family.

We don't see,

because, you know, we grew up

and they grew up going to...

a different daycare,

which had  
different things in it,

and it had, you know,

kids in wheelchairs,

and kids that didn't like  
crust on their sandwiches,

and kids that couldn't  
touch the blue block,

and, you know, kids that could  
only go to one sort of toilet,

that's normal for them.

So they don't see the world,

and I don't teach them  
that the world's any different,

because it isn't.

[Narelle] Isn't  
that interesting?

Because what you're talking  
about are people's perceptions,

and all the way through,

everything you've said  
is people's perceptions

and beliefs.

The underlying beliefs...

that are fuelling  
those perceptions.

[Shiralee] And everybody thinks...

that they're not  
part of that, which...

with my own disability and  
my own perceptions of things,

I find fascinating, because,

there has been times where we  
have been discriminated against

or the perception  
has been different,

because teachers  
will read these huge,

I mean, they've got  
mountains of paperwork about...

the things that these  
children can and can't do.

And then they see  
them and they're like, oh.

You're a functioning  
human being.

And we've had people  
come at us that might...

what they consider  
themselves to be neurotypical

or normal or whatever,

and, you know, they're like,  
but your children, you know,

only like chicken  
nuggets or whatever.

But then they're  
what they call normal,

and they'll be like, I don't.  
Like sauce on a burger.

Oh, I don't like,  
you know, potato.

I only like sweet  
potato fries, you know?

I only,

and it's like, what's  
the difference?

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] Just because...

[Shiralee] Just because I  
got a label attached to mine,

because I need medical  
help and things and stuff.

I'm no different to you,

I like a different food and  
you like a different food,

I have a way of doing things.  
You have a way of doing things.

I found it fascinating with  
the physiotherapist, actually,

because the boys  
struggle tying their shoes.

And I was trying to teach  
them to tie the shoes my way,

I thought there was a certain  
amount of ways to tie shoes.

And the physiotherapist

said to me,

do you know that  
every single person

on this planet has a different  
way of tying their shoes?

[Narelle] Really?

[Shiralee] Yeah.

Nobody ties their  
shoes the same way.

They might look the same,

but where they place the fingers  
on the length of the lace,

which hand they  
start with first,

which bow goes first?

Whether they use a bow,  
whether they use a knot,



whether everybody's different.

I was like, that is fascinating.

-[Shiralee] Like...

-[Narelle] How can it?

[Narelle] This is getting  
more and more fascinating,

because, okay, we've  
looked at that part.

What about on the IT side?

The digital content side?

What type of issues  
do you have yourself?

You, Shiralee,

because you're saying you've  
got these 27 chromosomal issues.

-[Narelle] What type of issues...

-[Shiralee] Me? Internet is...

[Shiralee] Interesting.

-[Narelle] Yeah?

-[Shiralee] Computers are...

fascinating.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] I have to get a  
lot of help from the boys.

Because and even  
they have trouble...

deciphering things.

-[Narelle] Yeah?

-[Shiralee] Like...

[Shiralee] Yeah. I mean,  
my eldest is...

the biggest computer  
nerd known to mankind,

and my youngest is following  
eagerly in his footsteps.

But like...

colours?

Why do people have  
a click now and it's red?

That, that signals  
danger in my head.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] And I...

[Shiralee] I don't know  
where to do this thing,

and sometimes you'll  
hit the next button,

but you didn't need  
to hit the next button.

It'll just do its thing.

And other times, like,  
people will send me stuff,

and they're like, oh,

Shiralee, you just, you know,

send me an email or  
whatever, and I'm like...

I don't know, like,

how do I. I just take  
photos of things.

Like I worked out now on the  
computer, how to, how to, like,

photo it and share it.

But, like, even  
starting this Zoom call...

took me, I had  
to, like, prepare,

you know, 30,  
40, minutes beforehand,

because evidently I had Zoom  
but I didn't have Zoom Workshop,

and then I had to, like,

reload Zoom Workshop,

and then it didn't  
want to work properly.

And I was like, do  
I shut this down,

because it's got  
the wheel going?

But if I shut it down, do I  
have to start all over again?

And then do I need to  
bring up another one? And...

-[Narelle] Oh my gosh. So...

-[Shiralee] It's...

[Narelle] How do your sons  
manage their school work?

How do you work with your  
sons with the school work?

And because I know  
teachers will say, yeah,

I want you to write  
an assignment about...

Japanese history.

How does your sons manage that?

How do you manage that?

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] They'll leave it.

If it's just like that,

they will leave it.

They will leave it until,  
yeah, they will ignore it.

And I won't know, because  
the teachers won't tell me,

until I get a call saying they  
didn't do their assignment.

And I'd be like, when  
was that supposed to start?

And they were like,  
about a month ago.

And I'm like...

did you tell me?

And they were like,  
well, they're 15 and 16.

They don't need that.

And I'm like, yes, they do,

because they don't understand  
the importance of things.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] They don't understand  
that this is important.

Once they understand  
that it's important,

then they will do it.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] But to them...

[Shiralee] There

is no hierarchy...

of importance.

Running from a burning building...

is the same importance

as pouring a glass of milk,

to them.

They don't understand...

why running from a burning

building is more important

than pouring a glass of milk.

They don't have

the bit in their brain.

They don't have fight or flight.

-[Shiralee] Both boys.

-[Narelle] Okay.



They don't have reflexes.

You know, when you fall down

and you get arm out

because you automatically like,

they don't have that.

They will just face

plant straight into the ground.

[Narelle] Wow. So what

can the teachers do?

How do you manage

that as a parent?

What should the

teachers be doing

considering this world of

digital technology?

[Shiralee] I ask the teachers

to let me know when they,

just CC me in.

That's all they have to do.

Just CC me in.

And then...

I can sit with  
them and go, okay.

This is important,

and they know...

when they're  
told it's important,

when they're in the classroom  
and the teacher's like, now,

this is very  
important for these,

they're talking to other people.

They're not talking to me.

They didn't use my name.

So, if they want,

because this is where  
we're at now with 15 and 16.

So the teachers usually make...

an appointment with  
them at lunch time,

and sit them down and go,

this is important.

And they will give them a,

a a countdown list,

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] And instead of  
handing the whole assignment in,

hand in your  
introduction on this date.

Hand in your body on that date.

Hand in your  
conclusion on that date.

And then they can also  
go, this is the rubric.

The kids now know  
what a rubric is,

and they can tick the bits off.

Have I done this bit? Tick.

Have I done that bit? Tick.

So, and then they  
know they're on track.

Yeah.

Usually it's like, A, B, C, D,

and like, if you need,  
if you want an A,

this is what you must include.

If you want a B, is this  
is what you must include.

It's what the teachers  
use to, to mark.

They market against  
what's called a rubric,

And each...

each A, B, C, D,

like grade,

has what needs to be in the  
assignment to get that mark.

So for them, it's  
extremely logical.

There is no...

thought put in it.

If they want an A,

and this is why I can  
happily get mad at them,

because I'm like, you picked B.

I know you picked the  
B because you got a B.

Because that's all they do,

is just follow the rubric.

And it doesn't matter...

what words they use,  
what fancy words they use,

what little words they, if,

if they say in the rubric,

you must include...

the trade route  
from Japan to China,

and they include the trade  
route from Jan, you know...

[Narelle] Yeah?

[Shiralee] To China,

they get the mark.

If you include the trade route  
from Japan to China, it's a C.

If you include the trade  
route from Japan to China

and you include the boat,

you get a B.

If you include the, the trade  
route from Japan to China

and you include the boat,

what was on the boat  
and why it was significant,

tick, tick, tick, tick, A.

[Narelle] Oh my God.

So really, digital...

content needs to be  
very structured for them.

[Shiralee] Mm-hmm.

[Narelle] Very objective.

Black and white, dot points.

[Shiralee] Yep. Very literal.

[Narelle] Very little.

If they're on a website

that has everything  
thrown at it,

it's gone.

-[Narelle] Too much.

-[Shiralee] Gone.

[Shiralee] Gone.

And if it's all like,



you know, this will  
make you feel like,

like a superhero, they're like...

that's not logical.

-[Shiralee] Click, you know,

-[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] But

it's also a case of,

if you, you know, stop smoking,

you'll add 10

years to your life.

And they're like, well,

how do I stop smoking

when I never started smoking?

Maybe I should start smoking,

because then I can stop it,

and add 10 years to my life.

And it's like, dude!

-[Shiralee laughs] No!

-[Narelle] Won't work that way.

[Narelle] You know, Shiralee,

this has gotta be one of the  
most fascinating ones I've done.

I can't thank you enough.

What's a couple of takeaways  
you can give everyone?

With the barriers, actually,  
I don't call them barriers,

just differences...

that you have?

[Shiralee] Yeah.

Always come back around is our,

is the biggest takeaway

I could give anyone.

If you're talking to somebody,

and they just don't  
seem to be getting it,

or you've asked them to do  
something and they didn't do it,

or,

always come back around.

Don't think they didn't do it  
because they didn't understand.

Or they didn't do it  
because they don't like you.

Don't think they  
didn't do it because...

Give it another crack.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Shiralee] You know, I'm...

constantly feeling disheartened

because people dismiss us,

because, oh, she didn't get it.

What...

Give me another  
way of, of doing it.

Explain it another way.

You know, don't just  
verbally attack me.

Maybe, you know,

show me.

Maybe give me a diagram.

Maybe,

you know, nobody...

I feel like in this life,

nobody doesn't want to be heard.

Nobody doesn't  
want to do something

if it's within their power.

Nobody like wants  
to ignore people.

Just give it another go.

Invisible disabilities  
are always going to...

far outweigh...

the ones that you can see.

And don't...

try to make people  
do things your way,

other ways are acceptable.

And don't try and make  
people do things that they...

literally can't do.

If I don't have  
the bit in my brain,

my brain can make other ways...

to get around it,  
but I don't have that bit.

I...

It would be like asking a  
paraplegic to get up and dance.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Shiralee] Find another way.

And we're all the same,

like we're literally  
all the same.

We have the same blood,  
we have the same heart,

we have the same  
thoughts and feelings.

We have love,  
we have emotions, we have...

We are people.

We're not...

disabled people, we're  
not able people, we're not...

neurotypical, neurodivergent.

There's no divide  
between anybody.

We are all people,

and we are all different  
in our own ways,

and that's what makes the  
world just such a beautiful

and wonderful place to be in.

So embrace it.

Embrace it,

and find out new  
ways to do things

that you never thought  
you could do before.

[Narelle] Shiralee, thank you.

-[Narelle] That was awesome.

-[Shiralee] That's okay.

[Narelle] Shiralee, how can  
people contact you to keep...

talking to you?

[Shiralee] I love  
talking to people

and finding new ways  
to do different things.

You can contact me on my email,

which is hellos Shiralee,



S-H-I-R-A-L-E-E,

@gmail.com

And I specialise in finding...

ways for people to do things

that they've always wanted to  
do but never thought they could.

[Narelle] Fantastic.

Thanks. I will make sure that's  
on the end of our podcast.

Shiralee, it's been a pleasure.

I have learned so  
much 15, 20 minutes.

-[Narelle] My God.

-[Shiralee laughs]

[Narelle] Just wonderful, and...

have a great 2025.

-[Shiralee] You too!

-[Narelle] If you...

If everyone likes

what we do, please like,

subscribe, share, review.

Ask Shiralee how to do another

way to follow what we're doing,

and just remember we

are all just normal people.

We'll see you next time.

Bye, bye.

Bye.

{\an8}[music playing]