

[music playing]

[Narelle] Good morning,
good afternoon,

and welcome to today's episode
of The Digital Access Show.

Today, again, we're looking
at digital accessibility,

and communication
joined together.

But we're looking at it through...

a different issue that I bet

most of you will
never have thought of.

Now, the federal election here
in Australia has just completed.

So what, two weeks ago.

And you all went to vote.

Everyone was expected to vote.

It is not voluntary.

Unlike the US and other
places, you have to vote.

Have you ever given a thought

to how a person
that can't see votes?

Or how a person
that can't use a pencil,

or a Biro votes?

Or they've got cognitive impairments

or mental health issues,

where the overload of the noise...

is too much for them?

Yes, there are postal votes,

but there's an issue here.

And to discuss this, I've

actually bought along,

invited Luna Rose to come.

Luna, thank you so much for
coming on and talking to us.

[Luna] Thank you for having me,
Narelle It's nice to be here.

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

[Luna] So, I'm in my early 30s.

I've got a vision impairment,
just that, totally blind.

And I am a very
passionate person

who has taken on so many causes,

and this one that we're talking about
today is really close to my heart.

As an Australian that is kind
of, you know, forced to vote.

[Narelle] Yeah.

Luna, what are you doing?

[Luna] Well, after my most recent experience with the...

federal election,

I have started a petition f0r, asking for...

accessible and independent voting,

for people who are blind and vision impaired,

like me, in Australia.

And the reason why I started off with blindness

and vision impairment is...

start small, in some ways,

and those systems can be adopted by so many other people.

So I'm...

campaigning for change

to how we as blind people
can vote in Australia.

[Narelle] One of the things
that impressed me is when you've

gone and set up
the petition, you've

actually given a
lot of thought into

different possible solutions...

to, how to allow us to vote,

because you've gotta,

And I suppose I'd like
to take a step back in...

No, let's, actually, let's cover,

You've given a lot of thought

into possible solutions for how

people with vision

impairment can vote.

Can you take us

through a few of them?

[Luna] So, I'm doing a bit of
research and watching,

you know, as a lot of young
people do, endless Tik Toks.

I have thought about ways that...

we can vote independently
without having the middleman,

because that's the problem, is...

having, it's like Chinese whispers.

How do you know that what...

you are whispering is going to be
passed on in proper translation?

So I thought about

ways that we could vote...

independently and accessibly,

Given that, first
of all, it is 2025.

We have come ...

just in the last few years with
technology, leaps and bounds.

There is no reason
why we can't vote.

So some of the solutions
that I think we need are...

either Braille ballots
or a tactile system,

which many countries
actually have already,

embarrassingly
enough for Australia.

Countries in Africa, who,

you know, we often are seen,
are seen as Third World.

They have solutions to
this problem that we don't.

[Narelle] Wow.

[Luna] So...

[Luna] Tactile voting.

You know, templates,
even the UK has that.

Ireland does as well.
So things like that.

Or an online system,
because we could fill out the...

census back in 2021 online.

I did it myself.

And... things like that that

take out that middle person.

Take out, you know, trying to...

tell somebody your vote in
a, often, loud polling booth,

or over the phone, where...

you're not guaranteed that your
vote is being written anyway.

[Narelle] What happened to you,

to make you decide
to campaign for this?

[Luna] Two things.

First of all, the
referendum back in...

[Luna] 2023.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Luna] For the indigenous
voice in the Constitution.

The man that I spoke to was
quite lovely at the beginning,

but as soon as I made my

choice in that referendum,

his tone immediately changed.

And that sort of...

casual conversation

tone had gone,

and was immediately...

I can't wait to be off the phone

from you as quick as I can.

And then,

most recently, I already started

thinking about what I could do...

for this election,

and a lot of my

friends were like,

there's the phone voting system.

We're happy just

voting over the phone.

And I said, No, I'm
not happy with this.

So I researched
alternative solutions.

And one option was...

what the Australian
Electoral Commission is

calling a text to speech...

highlighter pen.

I called the AEC, and nobody had
any idea how this pen worked.

So it was just show up,

you know,

see it for yourself,

and if it doesn't work, you're
still marked off on the ballot,

and on the, on the roll anyway. So,

that's what I did.

And getting there,

it was basically,

I was handed this pen...

that's probably about

the size of one of those...

sort of old style...

USB internet modems.

I plugged it, you know, plug in
these headphones which had...

non reusable, you couldn't...

swap the tips over.

Basically, headphones that would
go from person to person's ears.

[Narelle] Yes.

[Luna] And all I

heard was gibberish.

And I said, that's it,

[Narelle] Yeah.

I know from my experience,

I did telephone
voting this time.

And...

There were two witnesses.

And look, it did take
about 25 minutes,

which you know that's
what you have to expect.

Even when you go and do voting
at the booth, it does take time.

So that didn't worry me.

What worried me,
though, was two things.

One,

they have to have two people,

so one fills out the form
and the other witnesses it.

Okay.

However,

the first thing that really worried
me is exactly what you said.

I could not be sure that the person
that's filling out that form...

was filling it out
the way I wanted.

And it's a big
trust issue there.

Because a person with sight,

a person that
doesn't have those...

lack of sight,

or whatever other issues

causing it to be hard to vote.

They can do it themselves.

They know what they voted.

The second part of it was the
person that read out the Senate...

voting papers had
a very strong accent.

I could not understand
what they were saying.

And I did not want to be
disrespectful to that person.

I really didn't.

So I thought, okay.

And I actually tried to
remember who was voting,

and you had to have, I think it
was six people in the Senate,

or six boxes you had

to fill in in the Senate.

[Luna] Six at the
top, five at the bottom.

[Narelle] That's right.
It was six in the top 12.

And I thought, I'm
not doing the bottom.

There's just too many people.

It would have
confused me too much.

So if I'd wanted to
vote for individuals,

it would have
been too confusing.

[Luna] Yep.

[Narelle] And I just took a
crack at it and said, okay.

ALP, LNP.

You know, One Nation, and
tried to work it out that way.

However, again,

how do I know that they were
understanding what I was saying?

And I like the words you
used, Chinese whispers.

It's a huge issue for it.
It becomes trust.

And it takes away a fundamental
right of democracy, doesn't it?

That we can vote.
-[Luna] It does.

[Narelle] Yeah.
So, what are you're...

You're hoping to get
change out of this.

What has been the response
from different people?

[Luna] It's interesting, because
my own community, who I thought,

and who are generally behind
each other on a lot of causes,

some people are just
like, oh, I don't care.

I just use the
phone voting system.

Some people have said, if you
you make it accessible for one,

you have to make
it accessible for all.

And, the, the most
amazing response

has actually been
from people who...

can see.

[Narelle] Really?

[Luna] I did a day,

last Wednesday, running around
here, there and everywhere,

taking flyers with the pe,
petition QR code to different...

local members of
parliament offices.

And yes, I didn't meet those
members of parliament, but...

even their staff
were very shocked.

Like, Oh, my God.
I didn't think of that.

But the biggest
support, I guess,

and the biggest inspiration
for me doing this...

was an independent
candidate that I actually met...

prior to the election.

And then, literally,
right after I had voted,

and I'd walked out of,
stormed out of the,

you know, the polling station,
storm clouds above my head.

And she didn't dismiss it.

She was actually very
interested to hear my concerns.

And I really think that...

it's amazing to see that,

it's not blind people who so
much care about this issue,

but it's the people who
haven't thought about the issue.

[Narelle] So what happened
when you voted this year then?

[Luna] I didn't vote.

[Narelle] You didn't? Why not?

[Luna] Because I couldn't.

I was handed this pen that was
supposed to be a life changer,

supposed to read the ballot, but,
again, I couldn't mark the ballot.

All it could do
was read it for me.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Luna] I had my support
worker and a voting attendant,

and the voting
attendant is like, I'll do it.

I'll do it.

I'll mark it for you.

Even though I'm like, no.

No point. The whole
reason, and I was

transparent with him
from the beginning,

is I want to vote independently.

And he said, I get that.

You know, this is how it works.

And...

He ended up just putting the
ballot, the papers in the box,

and I walked out.

[Narelle] Good on you.

One of the other things
I actually found was,

before I voted, I actually was
trying to do some research...

into what are they
all standing for.

You know, you go to
vote at the polling booth,

and you're handed
these slips of paper, right?

You and I can't read them.

Number one,
it's not accessible there.

But you know,
it was quite interesting,

that all these parties that
want you to vote for them.

Their websites
aren't accessible,

or fairly accessible.

To try and get hold of someone
to talk to them about it...

is not possible.

And the same thing happened
with the voice referendum.

I actually tried to

read the whole of that,

it was a 200 page document,
or whatever it is, where it...

went into the study and everything
that went behind the record.

I actually, I got
halfway through it,

and, you know, it
was too hard to read.

The PDF was
accessible to an extent.

However, you had to,

okay, you have to go
back to this section,

or you have to, you were jumping
all over the place at times,

to try and follow the links.

It became inaccessible
that way as well.

What was your experience
in trying to work out

who to vote for?

[Luna] Again, a lot of research.

I actually found a website
where I sort of got to...

reasonably accessibly,
sort of tick...

my interests and the
things that I aligned with,

and it sort of spat out like a
bit of a ballot image, like put...

you know, Clive Palmer here,

Bob Katter here,
and so on and so on.

So, it did that, but...

again, no sort of real...

easy way to find out
each of their values.

It was only through meeting this
independent that I actually found out,

you know, hey, her values align
actually with a lot of mine.

[Narelle] That was the other
interesting thing, wasn't it?

I mean, we don't
get access to the...

people running.

We don't get access
to the information.

We're reliant on the media,

and how biased is
the media at times?

You just don't know.

[Luna] You don't.

[Narelle] So...

[Narelle] It is,
I actually think

what you're doing
is a fantastic...

initiative, campaign

Because, after all,
what people don't realise is,

it is actually breaching the
Disability Discrimination Act,

in not allowing us
to vote indepently.

[Luna] And that our own
government allows that.

[Narelle] And our own
government's the one that...

creates the Disability
Discrimination Act,

administers it.

And this same problem
is replicated in state.

It's replicated at the local
shire council elections.

It's not just one, is it?

[Luna] No.

The sad thing too is that
New South Wales had iVote.

[Narelle] Yes, and what did
you find out about that?

[Luna] It was
retired as recently,

I think somebody said, 2023.

[Narelle] Yeah?

[Luna] Or 2022.
It didn't work. And they just...

closed it down.

It hasn't been reinstated.

They haven't thought, hang
on, why didn't this work?

So when we had COVID,

here's the other issue,
if you have a worldwide...

pandemic like COVID,

and the problem with the
accessible phone voting line is...

it is a very easily
searched number.

How can you vote over the phone?

So what a lot of people were
doing, even who could see,

was ringing up the line meant for
people with, with vision impairments.

And the, I guess the
phone operator's time,

and the line was so congested with

these people being told, no.

You have to go into
the polling booth.

And it meant that people
like me couldn't get through.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Luna] So we run the risk
of that happening again.

[Narelle] We do.

And the other thing is, I
ended up finding after I voted,

that you could ring the AEC,

and get the information
sent out in accessible formats.

Well, wouldn't it
be just easier if all...

political parties ensured...

that their information

is always accessible?

[Luna] Yep.

[Narelle] So what's your
next steps now, Luna?

[Luna] My next steps are to
hit the ground running again.

Keep sharing the
petition as much as I can.

Get on my social media.

I've been firing emails
left, right, centre basically.

Scatter gunning
everybody that I can,

and just really pushing for,

you know, more notice.

More...

The more you talk
about something,

the more people start to listen,

the more people
start to think about it.

I think at last count, we've
already had 450 odd signatures,

and that's 450 people that
are now aware of this issue.

And if each of those...

450 told, you know,

one more person, or two
more persons, two more people,

that's over 1000 votes.

I should say 1000 signatures.

My next step, I guess, is...

really pushing the
word of mouth and,

you know,

reaching out to people
who are in a position to...

make...

[Narelle] Help us
make the change.

[Luna] Yeah, make the
powers that be aware of,

hey, this needs to happen.

[Narelle] Yeah.

Because I think people forget.

You know, when you get older,

it's one of the side
effects getting older.

Your sight starts to go.

Your hearing starts to go.

Your ability to use a
mouse in particular.

Low muscle tone can go.

You might not be able to manage
to use a computer anymore.

There are so many reasons why...

having accessible voting,

and not just on paper,

is important.

Strokes.

So many health conditions
that happen as you get older.

Luna, what's some advice that you can
give everyone that's listening?

[Luna] Keep fighting the fight.

If you are as passionate about
this or with anything else,

Speak up.

I didn't, you
know, I sat on this

for years since
that last referendum,

and it's only recently,

I started the petition literally
the day after the election.

Had I started it before the election
and before the campaigning.

It could have been
something that made...

its way into...

a reason for people to
vote for different parties.

So fight for what
what you believe in.

Fight for what you
want to see changed.

[Narelle] I think it's the

best advice you can give.

And I just want to congratulate
you on what you're doing, Luna.

Luna, how can
people contact you,

to keep talking about
the conversation?

What's the best way to find you?

[Luna] The best way to contact
me is through my website,

Lunarose.info.

There's no hyphens or anything.
It's just Lunarose.info.

[Narelle] And I'll put that on
at the end of the podcast.

There will be some information there
about how you can contact Luna.

Look, I'm...

Obviously as a person with
severe vision impairment myself,

I am affected.

And I have signed
the petition already.

As soon as I saw it,
I signed it straight away.

And I'm urging,

everyone go and
sign the petition,

because once the system, as
Luna says, is up and running,

it's validated, and it works.

And after all, we do
our banking online.

We do myGov, NDIS.

There are so many government
services that are online now.

Voting is just one more service.

We do the census, as Luna said,

so I'm urging everyone
to go and sign the petition.

It can be found on change.org.

What's the title of
the petition, Luna?

[Luna] Now you're testing me.

[Narelle] What's that?

[Luna] Now you're testing me.
It's quite a long one.

Let Us Vote,

make voting accessible
for blind Australians.

Something on those lines.

[Narelle] That's alright.

What I'm going to do is

I'm going to share that link.

You'll find on the Digital
Access Solutions page.

So look, if you like
what we're doing...

on The Digital Access
Solutions podcast,

The Digital Access Show,

please like, subscribe, review,

share.

I love feedback, whether
it's good or bad or ugly.

And just support us so
that we can be independent,

so that we can...

be part of society and
part of the community.

See you next time.

[music playing]