

[music playing]

[Narelle] Good morning!

Welcome to this week's episode
of The Digital Access Show.

A couple of weeks ago,

I talked to Paul Price
from Reading Radio,

and we talked about...

the changes that he's
seen with legislation,

and does it make a,
has it made a difference

for people with disability...

in accessing information?

We got his thoughts. Now,

he touched on a
couple of things,

and I actually had
a think about it,

and I thought, you know, I'd like
to explore that a bit more in depth.

So, this week is
Cherie Patterson.

Cherie has worked in both
the public and private sector.

Cherie has...

and fix it if it's
wrong, Cherie,

two different disabilities.

However, Cherie
has worked all her life.

She is a worker, full on.

She's currently a team
leader at her current workplace.

And I just thought I'd love
to chat with Cherie about...

her perceptions
and thoughts about...

from when she
started working to now.

Has there been a
big improvement?

What needs to be done?

Welcome Cherie, and
thanks for being on this show.

[Cherie] Thank you.

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

[Cherie] So, I've been
visually impaired since birth.

So, all my schooling,
I had about five percent...

vision.

But then I've lost the

remainder of that...

from about the age of 18.

And I also have

hearing loss in both ears

from about the age of 40.

So, but yes, I've worked

full-time from the age of 18,

in varying different roles.

So, in IT, customer service,

HR, so I've changed

careers a few times.

[Narelle] Cherie, when

you first started work,

what was your experience with

regards to digital accessibility?

So, I think you're still

in your early mid-40s,

you're a baby is

what I laugh and say.

But you know, 25, 30 years ago,

what was it like to be vision impaired,

have virtual, have no sight,

and working full-time

in admin?

[Cherie] Yes. So,

there was not a lot around
as far as accessibility,

or what people knew.

So, I was using, I entered
the workforce using JAWS,

and people really
didn't know about it.

So,

I found, as a person
with a visual disability,

I really needed
to know about it.

So, I needed to be the IT
expert of the accessible,

accessible equipment that I had.

Also, in the work places,
there weren't sort of any...

accessibility requirements.

So, like for instance,

one of my earlier jobs,
I ended up leaving,

because they brought in new
software that didn't work with JAWS.

So, there was not a
lot of focus of checking...

if my accessible
software would work with...

their software,

[Narelle] What about document structure? What about...

PDFs, all of that?

So, none of it was accessible?

So, how did you manage?

How did you work?

Might seem like a dumb question,

but if software and documents are not accessible,

it can be a problem.

[Cherie] You'd become a little bit creative. There is...

software out there that might...

convert a PDF to Word.

I couldn't even tell you what I use back in those days.

You become very

creative of just,

you know, even finding freeware
software that converts something

Or...

I have a very good memory.

So when a document's
been talked about,

I just file it all away.

So, definite relying
on my memory when

people are talking about documents,

and, and do it that way.

[Narelle] Yeah. What...

changed?

Has it changed?

So, say 20 years ago.

So we talked about 25,30

years ago, 20 years ago,

what was improved?

Did it improve?

[Cherie] It certainly has
improved from those days.

Accessibility is certainly
talked about more.

I still find that I need to be
the expert with my equipment.

But you know, attempts are
made to try and check that...

software is accessible
with the other equipment.

One of the biggest
issues that I find is...

a piece of software off the shelf
will be, will say this is accessible,

but when you're working
in like different businesses,

or government agencies,

they have their own local setup.

And so when that software
is brought into the local setup,

which might have different rules

and regulations
on how that software works,

then JAWS won't work with it.

Or the company says, if
you buy this gold version,

this works with JAWS.

But obviously companies
are trying to save money,

and they're like, "No, we want to buy
the vanilla basement version."

And the vanilla version
does not have the bells

and whistles which
makes it accessible.

So money is a very big driver,

and unfortunately that can
mean it's not accessible.

[Narelle] So what caused
the change to happen?

Was it legislation?

[Cherie] Yes.

[Narelle] It was legislation?

[Cherie] I reckon
legislation has...

impacted some changes,

but I think also society has
impacted some changes.

So for instance, if we
think about mental health,

mental health is talked about a lot

more than what it was 30 years ago.

And I think that
talking about disability...

is something that is
talked about a bit more.

So, if people are willing to
talk about it a little bit more,

then there's also
the accessibility side.

And there are some
companies out there,

can I say company names?

So for instance,

Apple have really
created a niche market,

that you can take something off
the shelf and it's accessible.

And they've
deliberately done that,

and that's a really
good market for them.

Microsoft's accessibility
products aren't as good.

And they've relied, I think, more
of their relationship with JAWS.

But Apple,

you can use something and you
don't have to do training for it.

So especially, like,
for the older generation,

and you know, those who
have acquired sight loss,

that is much easier than having
to learn a whole new program,

such as JAWS or Zoom Text,

and they can just start working,

and getting on with some

their things in their lives,

such as, you know, sending
an email on their phone or...

getting back some of the things
that they want to get back.

[Narelle] Yeah, it's
interesting, isn't it,

that, you've said, it's a combination
of society and legislation.

[Cherie] I think it's both.

[Narelle] Because I'm actually,
I agree with you there.

However, what I'm also seeing,
particularly in the NDIS sector,

is a lack of awareness
about digital accessibility,

So if you've got society
and legislation doing it,

why do we have...

the providers, the disability
providers, not being aware?

What do you think's the reason?

[Cherie] I think with providers,

it's time and money,

and a lack of curiosity.

So I think it's,

you know,

providers are in
it for the money.

I mean, you might have
some who are passionate

about a particular type of disability,

but at the end of the
day, it's a business.

And so they're in
it for the money,

not because they like all
people who have disabilities.

It's a business, and...

they...

may not have the time or...

curiosity to find out more
about different disabilities,

and how to best
support that disability.

[Narelle] Wouldn't
you think, though,

that as a person supporting
people with disability,

it would be...

higher in their agenda?

[Cherie] You would think so.

You would think so,

but from the different
supports I've had since NDIS,

that's not necessarily true.

[Narelle] Yeah.

What about government?

Do you see a change in...

digital accessibility
over the last 20, 25 years,

In dealing with government,

you'd have had to
deal with Centrelink,

you know, disability pension,

all the things that you've
had to deal with over the years.

Medicare, that's a classic.

And the NDIS.

Have you seen changes?

[Cherie] I still find that
the change is very slow

So is it different
from 25 years ago?

Yes, but then, all right.

So if we take NDIS, are all
their documents accessible?

No.

And yet they're the flagship
for accessible support.

You would think they
would be able to get it right.

So,

are we better than where
we were 25 years ago? Yes.

Have we got it right yet? No

No. I find that accessibility
sometimes is an afterthought,

rather than being
the upfront thought.

[Narelle] What's
stopping people?

What's stopping government from
making it part of the process?

[Cherie] Money.

[Narelle] Money?

[Cherie] Well,
that's what I think.

[Cherie] I think it's money.

[Narelle] Yeah?

[Cherie] Because time is money.

[Narelle] However,

wouldn't it be if it was just part of
standard operating procedure?

It's just part of your document
templates, everything you do,

you think that
would make it easy?

[Cherie] You would think so,
but it makes the process longer.

And if they're wanting to have
some quick

wins and get things out,

then if it's part
of a tick sheet,

it may sometimes be
seen as a nice to have,

not something
that they must have.

[Narelle] Do you think there's
a political basis behind that?

Or is it just money?

[Cherie] Maybe in some
cases, it might be political,

but I think it's money.

[Narelle] That's so
interesting, because...

I suppose I always thought
about it as people didn't know.

And the second thing was...

just they didn't
see a need for it.

[Cherie] There
would be some of that.

And I think sometimes
you'll get the comments,

oh, well, you know,

our company is, you
know, so many thousands,

and we only have
one or two people.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Cherie] So why do we want
to invest all this time in hours

for one or two people?

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Cherie] So...

[Cherie] Yes, there are some
people who have no idea.

That's definitely the case.

Yes, there...

Like you said the other,
you know the two reasons.

Yes, there is a bit of that,

but I think the other
one is the investment in...

time, energy, money,
when it's not seen to be...

something that brings a benefit
to the business that might have,

you know,

lots of people for a very small...

amount,

[Narelle] What could
turn that attitude around?

Because, obviously,
you and I both

know there are a lot of people
with disability that work.

A lot of them, you don't
see as people with disability,

and they struggle.

And a lot of it is quite a
silent struggle, isn't it?

[Cherie] Well,

you know, you do have
it as part of legislation.

But...

unless someone puts in a...

unless someone
puts in a complaint,

there's no accountability.

[Narelle] One of
the things I found

interesting talking
to Paul Price,

is he's made complaints,
and he said,

a couple of times he just got paid
out, and he got compensation.

He said there was
no systemic change.

So is it that there
is accountability is,

accountability is required
to give systemic change?

[Cherie] I think yes.

Yeah.

So I know one
company I worked for,

I had, as part of an outcome,

that there was changes
in their internal processes

that said any changes
that had been made,

also needed to be
checked with the...

I can't remember, it was like
Royal Blind Society or something.

[Cherie] It wasn't... Yep.

[Narelle] Okay. Yes.

[Cherie] So I actually...

said, okay.

You want to throw money.

I understand that.

But this is more all
for the next future

visually impaired
people who come along.

So I want to, i, as
part of this settlement,

want a change in
your procedures.

You know?

I think accountability,

so the Get Out
of Jail Free card,

if we want to call it that way,

is that...

while legislation
says, you know,

things need to be

made accessible,

it also says unless
there's, you know,

financial hardship on...

that business,

and... that's the loophole.

So a small business will say,

you know, we're
only five people,

and to be able to make this
accessible is not possible.

And then a large
organisation will say,

well, we can't make
this program accessible,

because we're a
business of, you know,

4000, 5000, 6000,

and to make a change to
that system is going to cost us,

you know, \$100,000 or whatever.

And...

we're unable to do that.

[Narelle] So really,
what you're saying,

that loophole is also
preventing people with...

sensory issues that rely
on assistive technologies,

the ability to work.

[Cherie] Well, potentially.

[Cherie] Potentially.

[Narelle] Interesting.

[Cherie] Whether that's in the
private sector or public sector.

And I understand why it's there.

And there's, so when I talk to...

people around accessibility,

I also talk about that

there are some jobs,

that it's unreasonable

to accept...

that there can be

accessible changes.

And the example I give is,

no matter what...

type of reasonable adjustment

or accessible changes made,

I could never be a bus driver.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Cherie] So...

[Cherie] There

are some jobs that,

as a visually impaired person,

I will never be able to do.

and I think that some
people need to come

to that realisation
about some jobs as well.

[Narelle] Yeah. I actually,
I do agree with you there.

Did you ever feel like
you were just a check box?

Yes, we employ a
person with disability?

In all the years
that you've worked?

[Cherie] No.

[Narelle] That's wonderful.
That's good to hear.

[Cherie] Do I feel that I've

been passed over for a job,

because I'm visually
impaired? Yes.

[Narelle] That was going
to be my next question.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[both laugh]

[Cherie] Yes.

Have I been asked inappropriate
questions in an interview,

because I'm visually impaired?

Yes.

So when I'm helping other
people prepare for an interview,

I talk to them about...

some people feel, you know,

they shouldn't ask me
questions to do with,

you know, my disability.

Yes, that's correct.

How much do you want this job?

And how much do you want to show
that you will not be phased?

So the question I was asked was,

"Given that you
can't see people,

how do you make
new connections?"

[Narelle] That's
an interesting one.

That's one I wouldn't
have thought of. Okay.

That surprises me actually, that
one, but people are out there.

[Cherie] People are out there.
And so, you know,

obviously I came
up with an answer,

and I got the job
on that occasion.

But it's...

it's about practising and, and

having your story ready, you know?

So you've brought
in a guide dog.

How much time is
that going to take?

Do you have to take them to the toilet
every hour or something, like you know?

And it's, it's about not being phased.

Schooling your face to
go, you can ask anything,

and I'm just going to come
back positive, you know.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Cherie] That can take skill,

especially when you've
acquired a disability,

and you're still getting used
to what is the story about me

that I want to portray
to other people.

[Narelle] Yeah. Interesting.

What do you think
will make the change?

What would cause
systemic change?

We know it's needed,

because there are a lot of us
out there that do want to work,

and want to work full time.

What's going to change?

[Cherie] The government,

we need someone who
is a really good champion...

of disability.

And I don't just
mean a minister who's

job it is around disability.

Because people go, well of course,
you're talking about disability.

That's your job.

But it would,

or a high profile person who
champions accessibility and IT.

So, for instance,

in Apple,

one of the new people

they have on the board...

used to work in...

American disability or
American accessibility,

or something like that.

So there's a company
who deliberately...

has someone on the
board to do with accessibility.

Now I'm not saying that
we'll get that sort of luck,

but I think it's...

someone who can...

almost market or...

champion that,

you know, visually
impaired people have...

brains can work in, you
know, high powered jobs.

That accessibility
is able to be done.

It just takes someone to think...

outside the square
and differently,

[Narelle] And be creative.

[Cherie] And be creative.

[Cherie] And a lot of
developments have been made

in processes, etc,

because it had to be changed for
someone who's visually impaired.

And then it's like, actually,
that's a better way to do it.

[Narelle] That's it, isn't it?

Cherie, what's a
couple of bits of...

good advice, takeaways that you can
leave for the people who are listening?

[Cherie] Be involved in the
changes that you want done.

You know. You're the best who understands
your visual impairments.

And so to come up
with some ideas of...

what you think
might be beneficial.

I've, I've found that I've always
been involved myself.

So, I think that's one of
my big pieces of advice.

Yeah, to have to have
some involvement in...

in the changes that you
want to have happen,

or in your workplace.

My...

My next piece of
advice would be,

is, especially for where you've

acquired a visual impairment,

or even if you haven't,

is, have your story ready,

so that...

you're not phased when
someone asks you a question,

and it can even be about
your visual impairment.

They don't need to know
the medical diagnosis.

It's just a quick sentence,

so you've asked it
and can move on.

So,

I'll say to people like, oh yes.

I've, I've been visually
impaired since birth.

I could see a little bit more when
I was young. I could read.

But I can't do that now.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Cherie] There's no need
for any more questions.

But...

It's done, it's dusted.

That's not me. My life is
about what I've achieved in,

you know, business and
personal, and stuff like that.

So I think having

your story ready...

is just a way to
quickly move on.

And that can be really, really
hard and confronting for people.

So I would say, have your story.

And be inquisitive.

You know, just cause someone
says you can't do something,

don't necessarily take
that as the answer.

There might be a
way you can do it.

It's just a different way, and that
doesn't make it a wrong way.

[Narelle] Cherie, I, I,

you know, look, you and I've
had some good conversations.

Those three pieces of advice are
really good pieces of advice,

and really, they actually
apply to everyone,

not just a person
with disability.

Doesn't matter who you are.

[Cherie] Yeah.

[Narelle] Be involved,

be inquisitive,

and have your story ready
for whatever you're taking on.

So, thank you.

Thanks so much for your time.

[Cherie] That's all right.

[Narelle] Cherie, how can people keep
in contact with if they want to keep...

finding out more about you and...

your career, which has been
quite a remarkable career.

[Cherie] Well, I will leave
you my email address, and...

you can connect us if
people do want to connect.

[Narelle] Thanks, Cherie.

[Cherie] No worries.

[Narelle] This is...

this week's episode of
The Digital Access Show.

I hope you like what we do.

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

Just love it, because I
always want to know...

where I can improve
or where I can learn.

I'm inquisitive.

Just ask Cherie.

And we will see you next time.

So please, like, share,
subscribe, review,

and we will see you next time
on The Digital Access Show.

Bye, bye for now.

[music playing]