

[music playing]

[Narelle] Good morning.

Welcome to the Digital Access Show.

Today, I actually have one
of my walking buddies here.

And yeah, we do walk.

We live close by and we're
known to go on a bit of a walk.

Sometimes, it
might be a quick one,

and sometimes,
it might be longer,

but the discussions we
have are very interesting.

Some are rants,
and some are not.

Please meet Tara Shekede
from Me Plus More.

Tara, thank you so
much for coming on.

[Tara] Thanks for having me.

[Narelle] Tara, I
know what you do,

but can you please tell
everyone else what you do?

[Tara] Yes, and let
me know if I'm rambling,

because I waffle
on for far too long.

So, I'll give you
the quickish version.

So, I run an online platform,

specifically designed for people
with an intellectual disability,

or a cognitive impairment,

to learn independent
living skills,

or employment-based skills.

It's a membership site that
has been specifically created.

So it's all around accessibility.

All of our content is
created in Easy Read English

to ensure that everyone
can understand the content.

And that's pretty much
in a nutshell what it is.

So, it's a membership site
that an individual holds.

They are able to
guide their supports,

and get some great
things happening...

in the time that they're
with their supports.

Or they can do it on their own,

which we have about 50
percent of our members

that access it on their own.

They can contact us
for tech support if they need,

and even ask us
about the content.

And that's pretty much it,

in a nutshell.

[Narelle] I wanted you on
here, there's two reasons,

so people can find
out more about it,

because you are passionate
about digital accessibility.

[Tara] Yeah.

[Narelle] And the other one
we'll talk more about later.

What are the things
that you've considered?

You talked about Easy Read,

but what are the things
that you've had to consider

in setting up this site,

in regards to
digital accessibility?

[Tara] Well, a lot of it was,

well, I'll go back
to where it started,

was I'm running a service.

I'm sending out all my
lovely support workers.

I'm putting out
fires constantly.

It's all I do. Putting out
fires, putting out fires.

And nothing was really happening
for the people we support.

And you hear the
chatter and it's always like,

support workers aren't doing
what they're meant to do.

They're not doing a good job.
And I was like, well,

I take the blame for that,

because I'm not giving
them the tools and resources

to assist those
they're supporting.

So this is where it started,

is that the individual...

does not have access,

easy access to resources
that they understand.

And it's for them.

And it's for them to
guide their support.

That's where I saw it,
not the support worker's fault.

It wasn't the
individual's fault.

It was that there
was nothing out there

that the individual
could access,

and easily access
and utilise with their supports,

and kind of take
control of that.

A service isn't coming and
saying what they need to do.

They can own it. It's theirs.

So, and it's built kind of on,

well, it is built
on the foundation

that everyone has a right to
work towards their independence,

and have the
appropriate tools to do so.

[Narelle] Yeah. And I think
that's the most important thing,

because, I mean, you've
been with me when,

and I use it all the time.

I can't, well, back
where we met,

I was really lost

until I found you,

because we were

at a Christmas party,

and I was really struggling.

I was by myself,

and it was like, oh,

she actually gets it.

And I was in a room full
of support workers and...

support coordinators, and
I've got no idea who was there.

But you got it and it
was here, have a seat.

Let's have a chat
and it was, okay, done.

And it worked.

[Tara] You the whole time.

[Narelle] What?

[Tara] I don't know
who was there,

because we were just
chatting the whole time.

[Narelle] We did.

But that's where
our friendship started,

and we realised we lived only
a few streets from each other,

and I thought this is good.

And I thought how sad is it

that we were in a room
of support coordinators,

everything else,

and a person with disability
was having those issues.

[Tara] Yeah, yeah.

[Narelle] It was not
really recognised, was it?

[Tara] No, not at all.
Not at all.

It's good that we hung
out that night and we met.

[Narelle] Yeah, it is.
Well, it saved my bacon.

Then I ran into another
friend and between you and her,

my bacon was saved.

A lesson is don't go to something
without a support worker.

[Tara] We're gonna
go together next time.

Aren't we? Carpooling this time.

[Narelle] Yeah,

we are carpooling.

But what I'm
really getting at is,

it's a normal problem that
people with disability have...

every day, isn't it?

[Tara] This is
what it was about,

is having somewhere
where individuals can access.

We are niche.

I'm talking about people
with intellectual disability.

That's my expertise.
That's where I work.

So, that's where I'm sticking,
sticking in my lane.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] It's about
having that accessibility,

cause to be honest,
there's lots of stuff out there.

There's some great stuff out
there but impossible to get to.

Jump on one of these
government websites.

It's maybe 15 clicks to get
to the Easy Read document.

[Narelle] Really?

[Tara] Sometimes it
takes me 10, 15 minutes

to find that document I'm
looking for in Easy Read.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] So, and that
was part of my research.

I was like, well, there's this
fab stuff that I found online,

but how long is it
taking me to get to it?

And do I know how to
navigate these websites?

Is it easy to navigate
these websites?

So, that's where I really
wanted to create a website

and a platform that was easy.

Everything's set out for you.

You've got the images,

the wording makes sense,

you can change the
website to Easy Read.

So, there's a click of a button,

and the website
changes all in Easy Read.

So, if an individual wants to
access the content like that,

off they go.

[Narelle] You talk about
activities of daily living,

and being independent.

What type of subjects do
you cover on the website,

and how do you cover them?

[Tara] So, we're getting into the
nitty gritty of the membership.

Yeah. So,

an individual would sign up,

say they want to do
independent living skills.

The idea is, and
I'm still going with it,

is everything that you
or I take for granted,

I want to get on it.

From how to access
the internet safely,

how to keep a schedule,

personal hygiene, consent,
sexual harassment awareness,

how to have a pet,

finances, being in
charge of your health care.

So, you see a really mixed bag.

Self-care, self-advocacy,

supported decision-making.

Loads, a really
mixed bag of things

that an individual
does need to learn

to be as independent
as possible.

So what they would do is
they sign up to the membership,

and they work through
a path of learning,

and go through the topics
where you've got videos.

I present the videos,

and it's got pop-ups.

It's interactive. It's engaging.

And then they get a
hard copy of a workbook,

which are behind me,

if you can see it.

And then they're able to
work through that content,

like I mentioned, by themselves,

or with their supports.

[Narelle] The thing is,

all that information,
as you said, is on the net.

[Tara] Yeah.

[Narelle] It's too hard to find.

[Tara] Hard to find,

and then it's not necessarily
in Easy Read either.

So there's a lot of information
out there they say is Easy Read,

and, you know,
it's getting there.

But there's certain elements
that really make it Easy Read,

and accessible for individuals.

[Narelle] So, people with
intellectual development issues,

Down's syndrome,
all of those issues,

what are the type of
issues that they have

in trying to access
the internet?

[Tara] When I've
spoken to my members,

there's safety as a big one.

They're not sure whether what
they're clicking on is safe.

And then again, like I said,
it's getting to that info,

those 20 clicks,

not understanding where you're
going to end up navigating to.

As we all know,

you get pop-ups when
you're on different sites.

You end up on a bad site,
you click on these pop-ups,

and it just gets out of
control where you end up.

So it's really just,

you know, when I first
started talking to people,

and seeing who my
members, you know,

would be, potential
members would be,

and finding out what it
was that they needed.

The main thing was
safety, to be honest,

is knowing they're
on a safe website.

[Narelle] Yeah, that's such
a big issue, isn't it, today?

It's one of my pet hates,
and I don't know about you,

but mine is where
you see click here,

all that generic wording,

learn more, read more.

And I, using my screen reader,

I use shortcut keys to say,

I want to go and
find the link to this.

Well, hang on, if I've
got click here, click here,

and you get pages
and pages of it.

I don't touch it.

How do you get around that?

[Tara] So, for example,

my call to actions would be...

I'd like to know more
info about dot, dot, dot.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Tara] So, it would be
stating in the click what it is.

I'd like more info on...

Yes, I'm interested in...

Always pop in what it is that

you're clicking on is helpful.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] Then you know
where you're going.

[Narelle] You cover that.

That's a course you're
currently doing, isn't it?

Or you've just got a
grant for it or something?

[Tara] Very exciting. We just
got a Commonwealth grant...

to create a stream of
learning just on digital safety.

The grant goes along with the
Act Now, Stay Secure campaign.

You might've seen it.
Do you watch TV? The ads are out.

They're the usual

government-style ads.

I hear them when my
kids are watching sport.

And they focus on
passwords and passphrases,

updating software,

and multi-factor authentication.

So, yes, three very
important topics.

So, we're using those topics
and then we're building on it.

We're also doing an introduction
to being safe online.

So, all that information on
how you can be safe online.

Scams. We've got
a whole topic on...

smart scam defence, it's called.

And then we've also
got social media safety.

We're covering everything in the
Act Now, Stay Secure campaign,

but adding to that for concerns
that my members have raised,

that they're
struggling with scams,

social media and emotions,

logging off,
taking time to themselves,

and just general
safety in general,

and you know, not meeting
people that you've met online,

and you're not sure who they are,
but if you do want to meet them,

it's okay, just make

sure you're safe,

with someone you trust, and
all that sort of information.

And somewhere public!

[Narelle] Somewhere public.

And it's so important, isn't it?

Someone said to
me the other day,

the disability discrimination
act that's getting reviewed,

is it was 1992.

And the digital...

environment that,

I mean, I remember because,
well, I was working then.

And it was...

We didn't have an internet.

We'd only just started
having the internet.

And it wasn't widely used,

and you didn't have smartphones,

and it was uncommon for anyone
to have a desktop computer.

A few people might have
had them but not like it is now.

So, the world's changed
drastically, hasn't it?

[Tara] Yeah. Yeah, so
it's so important to ensure...

that people are safe online
because so much can happen.

Unfortunately.

[Narelle] And unfortunately,

people with intellectual
developments...

can be so easily scammed.

[Tara] Which is why I'm
so excited that we've got this,

the program
funded, and it's free.

So for individual,

I mean, service providers can
use it in their programs as well,

which is exciting.

So I'm just starting to
get that out to offer that...

actually Australia wide,
because we are Australia wide,

because we are
an online platform.

[Narelle] Yeah. What...

should support
coordinators be doing?

What should plan
managers be doing?

People in the disability sector,

with the issues that
you're talking about,

how should they be handling it?

[Tara] I'm big on education.

Big on education.

So, you know how I
mentioned at the beginning,

I was always putting out fires,
fires, fires, just constantly.

If this sort of education was
in for those people we support,

then at least one thing,

the digital safety,
is covered already.

You've got that constant
education around it,

you can reuse resources,

and have an easy access to it.

So that's that
constant education.

So in my mind,
it's all about education.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] Before it's too late.

[Narelle] Yeah.

But I also think it's education
of the support coordinators,

and the plan managers.

[Tara] And them knowing
it's important. Yeah.

[Narelle] Yeah.

Because most of them don't know,

or they might have a
very, very broad knowledge.

Now, they know a tiny bit
about digital accessibility,

but...

what, you know, what can we
do as a community to help them?

[Tara] I think it's,

again, I go to the education,
and even though my stuff,

the stuff that Me Plus More is
offering is for the individual,

their supports...

can learn at the same time.

And it reminds me
about how important it is.

And usually if I speak
with support coordinators,

or some, you know, providers
who run some sort of program,

they go through the
content before they offer it,

cause they want
to see what it is.

So, there's your
education as well.

It's finding random programs
like Me Plus More offers,

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] And really
getting all this stuff out.

[Narelle] It's having the time,

and I think that it's good
you're doing, because...

[Tara] Everyone needs
to look at the content,

but you've got seven
million things to do.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] On top of it. Yeah.

[Narelle] When you look at it,

you know, for me talking
about digital accessibility,

and yeah, some people say I bang
on about it and rant about it,

but I know the benefits
for people with disability.

The support coordinator with
50 people that they're juggling,

or the plan manager where,
you know, all these things,

they are really reliant on
the service providers they use,

which could be IT.

It could be,

I don't know, there'd be tons.

And if those people don't do it,

and the support
coordinators don't do it,

or, you know,
the NDIS service providers,

there's an issue
there, isn't there?

[Tara] Yeah, definitely.
And it gets lost because...

it's not front of mind.

It's an important thing
to be front of mind,

especially with how good these
scams are getting at the moment.

[Narelle] Yeah.

What's a scam that you're aware
of at the moment that's a biggie?

Funnily enough, I haven't
gotten any recently,

I don't think, very recently.

But I always talk about this one
because I think it's fantastic.

Shocking, but it's a good one.

So, when I first moved
up from Brisbane,

we went through some
tolls in Queensland.

I was very sure that my
E-Toll covered Australia, right?

I was sure, so I wasn't worried
about my tolls and that stuff.

But the next day,

the very next day,

I get a text message that
says, you haven't paid the toll.

Click here to pay the toll.

I was like, huh, just gone
through a toll in Queensland.

Maybe it doesn't work.

But then I thought to
myself, no, I'm sure it does.

I was this close to clicking on
it because it was good timing.

Say they sent that scam
out to seven million people.

My exaggeration.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] They need one person
to click to go, oh, my gosh,

I do need to pay a toll.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] What did I do?
Instead of clicking,

I went on and had a look.

I logged in online on my E-Toll,

just to check
that it did get paid,

and it was paid.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] Such a good one.

[Narelle] And the words
they used were click here.

[Tara] Yeah, of course.
It's all click here.

[Narelle] It's all click here.

[Tara] Yeah. Yeah.

And that is something that we,

you know, we go through
a lot in the program,

is not clicking on links.

If it was E-Toll that
sent me a message,

they wouldn't say click here.

They would say,
log into your account.

So we talk a lot
about that language.

MyGov will never
ask you to click.

ATO will never ask you
to click in a message.

They will always say, go
and log into your account.

That's the things
we need to look out for,

is that type of language.

[Narelle] That's a good tip.

What are some other tips that
you can give the support workers,

the support coordinators,

the people that work
in the disability sector...

around this topic?

[Tara] I always go back
to my education, don't I?

Having those conversations.

Really, if you're
supporting someone who...

unfortunately has been scammed,

and to be honest,
most of us have,

with an intellectual
disability or not.

Some of them get
through like that E-Toll one.

Sometimes it gets through.

And it's just constantly talking
about it and knowing it's okay.

So, and speaking up,

so we did get scammed.

Let's talk about it to stop
it happening in the future,

and reminding the individuals
that you support that it's okay

that you got scammed
once or twice,

but let's not have
it happen again.

The secrecy is a
problem as well,

and the embarrassment,
and that's what they rely on.

They rely on the secrecy,
the embarrassment.

It could be that you
gave your bank details,

and then they ask
you to keep it a secret.

Keeping it a secret won't
get your money back,

if they ended up
getting into your account.

So it's about conversations,

and throwing it
in a conversation.

You're at the cafe with
someone having a coffee,

just chat about scams,

chat about what you do.

You know, just throw
it in a conversation.

Look at this text message I got.
That is totally a scam.

And just talking about it.

[Narelle] Yeah. That's the
best tip you can give, isn't it?

Tara, how can people
get in contact with you

to keep the conversation going?

[Tara] So,

email, phone, text.

I've got a chat
button on the website.

Contact us on the website.

Seriously.

All social media.

Well, not all social media.

We've got Instagram.

We've got Facebook, LinkedIn.

Yeah, loads of
ways to contact us.

You just can even
Google Me Plus More.

It'll pop up and then
you can go through,

at the bottom of the page
are all the contact details.

There's a form you can
fill out to get in touch.

Yeah.

And we're all about being
able to be in touch easily,

because we do the
tech support ourselves.

So if we have a member,

and there's an issue with
their membership or something,

most important issue is when
the gamification doesn't work.

I get those a lot.

So what if they didn't get their
points for finishing the lesson,

or a badge didn't pop up when
they should have gotten a badge.

They should be on top of
the leaderboard this month

and they're not
on the leaderboard.

Let me know. I can fix it.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Tara] Very easily contactable
because of that as well,

because we do our
tech support in-house.

[Narelle] And the website is?

[Tara] Meplusmore.com.au.

[Narelle] Thanks, Tara.
Thanks for coming on.

It is an important subject.

And, yeah, people do
get scammed easily,

regardless of intellectual
development problems,

or sight issues
or anything else.

[Tara] Anybody, anywhere. Yeah.

[Narelle] Yeah.
Check the wording.

Don't click on click
here or learn more.

[Tara] And if it's too good
to be true, it probably is.

That's one of the best ones.

[Narelle] Thanks, Tara,
and we'll catch you.

See you later.

If you like what we do,

please share,
review, like, subscribe.

You can find all our old
podcast episodes on YouTube,

and also on our website,

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And we really do,

and would love to receive any
feedback that you can give us.

So we'll see you next time
on the Digital Access Show.

Bye-bye.

[music playing]