

[music playing]

[Narelle] Good morning.

Welcome to The
Digital Access Show.

My name is Narelle Wright.

Yes, my name has changed.

And I'm the host of
The Digital Access Show,

where we look at digital
accessibility and communication.

Why is it important?

Well, I have a severe
vision impairment myself,

and all I see is shapes.

So when I'm given a
document that I can't read,

or someone says to me,

I'll just read it to you.

That is actually
very disabling for me.

I've got a lot of education,

and know how to do it.

So today's guest,

I think is in a similar boat
to me with added extras.

So, I'd like you to meet Jen
Engels from Engels Floyd.

Jen, thank you so
much for coming on.

[Jen] Thanks, Narelle.
It's great to be here.

Jen, can you tell me a
little bit about yourself,

and your journey
with your disability?

[Jen] Yes, so I was born into
the human services sector.

And so, when I was 16 or so,

my friends were
actually going out,

getting part-time
jobs after school,

and then starting
to get their learners,

drivers licenses, all
that exciting stuff that,

you know, people of that age
do as they get independent.

And I thought, oh, I
want a piece of that.

And I was never in a
position to be able to drive,

or get it past
the learner's test.

So I thought, well, actually,
maybe I could get a job.

And so, I tried to get
a job after I left school.

And at that stage,

I have severe vision loss,

so legally blind.

But also,

I had all this other health
stuff going on at the time.

And look,

I went to the Commonwealth
Employment Service,

for anybody out there
who remembers that.

So it shows my age.

So I went there and spoke to the
disability representative there,

and they tried to get
me a job but just couldn't.

No one would employ me,

or the jobs that they put me
forward for weren't appropriate.

So there were
things like cooking,

cooking in a fast food place,

like hot chips and
that sort of stuff.

And I thought, I'm gonna...

I'm gonna burn myself.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Jen] And I wouldn't have
been able to hold down a job.

So I thought,

all right, well, if no one
is going to employ me,

I will employ myself.

And so at age 20,

I did that.

And then got an ABN
and thought, right, this is it.

I'm going to employ
myself, and so I did.

So fast forward to now,
I am doing all sorts of things.

So, the bulk of my work is for
Australia's accreditation body,

JAS-ANZ, and assessing...

certification bodies.

So, bodies that go out
and audit all sorts of things,

and running a lot of training.

I do a lot of training as well.

[Narelle] Okay.

So, when you talk about
the vision impairment,

you had that from birth.

What type of barriers were you
finding when you were at school?

Because schools
were so different back,

even 20, 30 years ago
to what they are now.

[Jen] Yeah, they sure were.

Yes.

It's interesting, actually,

because it was
recommended to my parents

that they put me into
special education.

We had a primary school across
the road from where we lived.

And my parents thought, well,

there's a primary
school across the road.

Like, why can't she go there?

And my parents actually went
and spoke to the primary school,

and they were amazing.

The headmistress
there said, bring her here.

We will look after her.

We will make sure
that she'll be okay.

So I actually went
to the primary school,

and got set up with

a visiting teacher,

as it was back in the day.

The problem was, though,

that I was a little child

sitting there with glasses,

so teachers thought that

the glasses fixed my vision.

But glasses don't

actually fix your vision,

particularly if you've got

something significant going on.

So I would sit up the

front, got my glasses on,

and they would write

on the chalkboard,

I am ageing myself.

[Narelle] It's all right.

I'm with you so far.

It's all good.

[Jen] But like with blue and
green chalk and stuff like that,

and of course I couldn't read it
cause the contrast wasn't there.

And my visiting teacher would
only visit like once a term,

and it just was not sufficient.

And that became more apparent
when I moved into high school.

So, again, still

mainstream high school,

still had the visiting teacher,

but you'd go from

class to class to class,

and no one knew that I had a

severe vision impairment at all.

They just,

and it was really stressful.

When I think of high

school, it was stressful.

So, it's just a lack

of understanding.

And it's not anybody's fault.

It was just that

they didn't realise,

there's lots of kids in school

with glasses and they do the job,

you know, the glasses

fix the issue sufficiently,

but not in my case.

And so the teachers

just weren't aware of that.

[Narelle] So if we

take it to the next step,

where you had to

create your own business,

what were you finding there?

There must've been

lots of barriers there.

There would have been a lot of,

you know, the paperwork,

cause everything was

hard copy back then.

The paperwork, everything.

How the heck did

you navigate that?

[Jen] So, starting my

business pre-internet,

that is correct,

which is horrifying, Narelle.

-[Jen] Think about that.

-[Narelle] Yeah!

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Jen] Thinking about it now,
I think, how did I even do that?

But...

Look, I had to be
really thoughtful about...

the amount of time that
I spent reading things.

At first, the type of work
that I did was public speaking,

and it was running training
or education sessions,

talking about basically my
own personal experience.

And so, because of that,

there wasn't heaps of
paperwork because I know me.

And so, I didn't have to
make notes on myself,

or anything like that.

So it was sort of minimal.

The paperwork side probably
didn't hit me until we had,

you know, computers and
internet and stuff anyway.

There was this period, though,
of not having really good...

screen reader availability
or anything like that,

or not having,

not having a decent big monitor.

So, my vision was better

back then admittedly,

although still severely

vision impaired but...

but there's degrees,

isn't there, of sight loss.

And so, because of that,

I just, I don't know how I

managed for so long on,

on just a regular-sized monitor.

I do now have

problems with my back

and my arm,
and all of that sort of stuff

from really bad
posture over the years,

unfortunately, so now
I'm really aware of that.

[Narelle] Yeah. So if
we fast forward to today,

cause I believe you've got a bit
of a hearing impairment as well.

What are the
barriers that you're...

finding every day in
everything you do?

[Jen] Yes.

It's really tricky.

This hearing

impairment happened...

about, you know, nine or so

years ago, something like that.

And it's...

it's in one ear,

so I've lost most of

the hearing in one ear,

and a bit in the other.

And so,

it actually is and was, but

still is, anxiety provoking,

because I didn't realise how

much I relied on my hearing.

Because when you
don't have a lot of sight,

your hearing is what you
rely on to get across the road.

So, getting across the road,
can I just say can be tricky,

because obviously I
may not see the car,

or I'm not sure how
far the car is away.

And now,

I can't necessarily judge that
by the sound of the car either.

So in terms of

digital accessibility,

it's...

You've got things like captions,
and captions are great.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Jen] But if you can't
see them to read them,

or if they're not
big enough to read,

then they're not much
good is the reality.

I actually have relied on
really good headphones.

These are old, these headphones,

but they are really good.

And I find that if I'm
in a situation like this,

online situation talking to you,

I find that they're
actually quite good.

And I tend not to
mishear anything.

But out, like socially,

like, and I was thinking
about this last night,

going to a restaurant,

if my husband and I go to
a restaurant, my husband...

is also hearing impaired,
much worse than me.

And so,

we can't hear each other.

And I can't see the venue.

It's a bit fun.

But I was thinking,

you know, we only like to go out
with one other couple maximum.

So four people maximum.

Anything over that
is really stressful.

And I don't think
people appreciate...

how stressful...

that something that's meant
to be fun can actually be.

Because there's
a lot to think about.

There's a lot of...

you know, neural lode,

because there's the
trying to see things,

and also the trying
to hear for myself,

but also if I need to help
out my husband as well.

So there's, it's a lot.

[Narelle] Yeah it is,
and it's very tiring.

[Jen] It is. Yep.

[Narelle] I know,
when I did have full sight,

I would come home, and
oh yeah, I'm ready to rock.

Now, half past eight,
yeah I'm done.

I am tired because it's...

that extra stress of trying
to work out who's talking.

[Jen] Yep.

[Narelle] In a restaurant

where it's busy and noisy,

it's too much,

it's just gets too much.

[Jen] And obviously I

can't see to lip read.

Like that, or get

even the mannerism,

because it's dim.

It's dim in a restaurant

and, you know, there's music.

Or dim, you know,

and yeah, it's tricky.

It's really tricky.

So, I am also a very early

to bed person admittedly.

[Narelle] Well, what about...

when you're like filling out
forms and things like that,

what are the
changes you've seen?

Have things gotten better with
being able to fill out forms,

and do everything,

particularly the NDIS.

Let's look at the
NDIS, a case in point.

Or Centrelink,
we've always got forms.

We get flooded with forms.

What do you find there?

[Jen] Look, if it's
an electronic form,

I can fill it in electronically,
that's not a problem.

If it's a printed form,
I get my husband to complete it,

because I'm just...

And luckily, I've got a husband
that can complete it for me.

So his eyes are working.

He's got the fancy working eyes.

So...

[Narelle] He went
premium, did he?

[Jen] Yeah, he did!

He did. I've got
the budget package.

[Narelle] Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah.

[Jen] And so, I just get him
to do it, or ask him to do it...

for me.

But not everybody
is in that position.

And I sometimes
know where I'm at.

And it's an ironic story,

but I was at an

ophthalmologist some years ago,

and they gave me a form

to fill in when I got there.

And it was like in,

and I'm not kidding,

10 or eight font.

And I was thinking,

I can't fill this in.

I can't fill this in.

And the same with those

cards that you get on airlines,

like coming back

into Australia card.

So I always have to get somebody
to fill those in for me.

It's just not possible.

Look, most people are lovely and
really helpful if you explain.

So, luckily, yeah.

[Narelle] Yeah.

So one of the things
that really fascinates me,

because we had
a chat beforehand,

we were talking about
the attitudinal barriers.

What have been the biggest

attitudinal barriers for you?

[Jen] Yes.

So,

I have to preface this by saying

it is probably my own fault,

but people...

don't recognise for the most

part that I have a disability.

Part of that stems from

the fact that I work remotely,

most of the time.

And so, people

don't get to see me,

not that I look any different

when they see me face to face.

But...

So, when I actually approach
an organisation to say, hey,

would it be possible to
make this more accessible?

That tends not to go
anywhere very much,

because they don't
actually recognise...

that there's a problem.

I mean, I do
obviously tell them,

I tell them I'm vision
impaired, blah, blah,

but they just...

it's not on their radar.

And I'm probably
one person out of...

all of, I mean, I'm not
an employee of anybody.

I just work for myself,

but I'm one
stakeholder out of many.

And so,

and this sounds a bit harsh,

and I don't mean it to,
but I'm not the priority.

So,

and they're under no
obligation to make their...

stuff accessible,

except for the fact that I need
it to be able to do my work.

Yeah.

[Narelle] So, why aren't
they under obligation?

We've got the Disability
Discrimination Act,

we've got the digital
accessibility standards,

we've got the legal
framework here in Australia.

Why aren't they under any
obligation to make it accessible?

[Jen] Well, I mean they
probably would be,

in terms of the Disability
Discrimination Act.

But...

But again, it's them not
recognising that any of their...

people have a disability,

or need alternative...

accessibility requirements.

So even though,

you know, I have mentioned
this a couple of times,

and things just move slowly,
just things move so slowly.

[Narelle] So it's assumptions?

[Jen] I think it's assumptions.

But I've sort of
pushed back a bit,

and have no longer participated
in things that I can't do.

If I put things in the wrong
colour font, not my problem.

[Narelle] Yep.

So, it's assumptions that
have caused the issue,

do you think?

[Jen] Probably.

Yes, probably.

And I think...

I think that it's

assumptions about perhaps...

the capacity of people

with a disability even.

I don't want to necessarily

say that that's what it is,

but it could be.

For some people, just who

have never been around,

you know, the
disability sector at all. Yep.

[Narelle] Yep. And you said
there's no obligation...

for them to make it accessible?

Why not, considering
we've got the,

you know, legal
framework here in Australia

with the Disability
Discrimination Act,

and everything
that goes with it?

[Jen] Yeah, well, I
mean, they are probably...

legally obliged to
make things accessible.

I'm one of many stakeholders.
I'm not an employee.

There's nothing in my
contract or contracts,

or anything like that that...

They've never asked about
about me or my preferences,

so they wouldn't know,

unless I have to
continually remind them,

if that makes sense.

[Narelle] Yeah. Yeah it does.

One of the things that,

and I found because

I know Sharon Floyd,

one of your business colleagues.

And...

I ended up watching,

because she linked me in,

some YouTube

videos you're doing,

that you're creating.

What's that about, Jen?

[Jen] Yes.

So,

recently I had a
discussion with a friend,

or about a year ago it was,

and she said to me,
what do you think...

has changed in
the disability scene,

in terms of awareness,

from now to
when I first started.

Because I was doing a lot
of disability awareness stuff,

when I first started my career,

and she said what do
you think has changed?

I said I think awareness overall
has increased during that time,

but I don't think
understanding has.

And so,

based on that,

and that's my own observance,

over my career,

And based on that,

I thought I really wanted to...

educate by stealth,

and make videos that are...

that are humorous,

that, you know, people
will have a laugh at.

Certainly not having a laugh
at the disability community,

but having a laugh,

and walking away thinking,
gee, I didn't know that.

And that was something
that they've learnt...

purely through watching
something they've enjoyed.

And so, I created this
channel, A Certain Eye,

and I've recently
pivoted to doing...

sort of parody type stuff.

And it's those things that...

anyone I think with a
disability will resonate with.

And it's about...

you know, perhaps a fully
sighted person saying, you know,

I met a blind person once,

so I know all about
blindness, I know all about it,

because I met a
blind person once,

which is obviously not true.

[Narelle] Yeah!

Yeah, that's right!

[Jen] And so, bringing in
the humour like that to really,

you know,

make a couple of characters
that have the best intentions,

but are actually
really clueless...

about blindness or
disability in general.

So, it's a lot of fun,

but it's been lots of learning,

particularly accessibility-wise,

lots of learning now.

[Narelle] What challenges
are you finding there?

What are the learnings?

[Jen] So, well, firstly, there's
all of this stuff about writing,

writing, you know,
editing, scripting,

you know, producing and filming
and all that sort of stuff.

But that's easy.

That's actually easy,

compared to thinking about,

okay, well, who

will be watching?

And...

of those,

what accessibility

requirements might they have?

And, of course, anybody

could watch a YouTube video.

So I've thought about people

with hearing impairment,

and I thought, should I caption...

everything?

And I thought, no, I won't.

I will rely on the

YouTube captioning.

And the reason I do that...

is cause having captioning can
be overwhelming for some people

that you can't turn off.

So, the YouTube captioning,
you can turn on and off.

And I thought I have
to leave it at that,

because I can get overwhelmed if
there's too much on the screen.

So, I've sorted that
out for the most part.

But then there's people who
are blind or vision impaired,

and that is tricky,

because I...

I'm doing satire,

you know, I'm playing characters,

and so I have started to
develop these characters.

They all sound like me

because they are me,

and I know that's tricky for
somebody who can't see anything

to be able to get who I
am at any point in a video.

So I've started to,

and it's all learning
and it all takes time,

and this character
development takes time also.

But I've started to define the
characters as individual people,

and having mannerisms
in which they speak,

and...

you know, certain speech
patterns that they use

so you know which one is
Cheryl or which one is Denise.

-[Narelle] Yes.

-[Jen] And...

[Jen] But also then,

there's this...

there's this thing

about visual humour.

Visual humour is great

if you can see it, right?

And I know myself,

back when I used to go to the

movies with friends and stuff,

we'd see a movie and

it'd be full of visual humour,

and I'd walk away

thinking that was...

that was a rubbish movie,

cause I didn't get the movie,

because I missed

all the visual humour.

[Narelle] Yep.

[Jen] But it's so easy
to do is what I've learnt.

It is so easy to put
visual humour into...

you know, a video, even
though I am legally blind,

I find it easy to put in this
visual humour, and I thought...

I need to be really careful
with that because I hate that.

I hate that.

So if I'm going to have
any visual humour,

it must be accompanied...

by something that makes logical
sense written into the script,

so that if there's a
noise in the background,

if somebody who
has, you know, the...

who has their screen off,

who has their screen off could
understand and follow the...

the video,

and understand what it's
about and get the jokes.

And so that is, it's taken...

it takes a long time to write
that stuff that I can be funny,

or I think I'm funny.

But be funny.

And also make sure that people,

make sure it's accessible
to as many people...

as I can.

-[Jen] So...

-[Narelle] Yeah.

[Jen] It is an ongoing challenge

that is in the back
of my mind constantly,

because obviously, you know,

I'm a blind creator and I

want to create for everybody,

not just the sighted community,

not just the blind community,

but everybody.

So, there's always

lots to think about.

[Narelle] What advice

would you give to anyone

that's listening to this

video in regards to,

you know, the creations

that you're doing with the...

videos you're making,

or even a person starting
out with blindness now today.

I know it's a very
different world...

to the world that we
grew up, pre-computers,

and everything else, and
chalkboards, I remember that.

And the old dusters,
you know the dusters,

the wooden dusters that used
to get thrown at people's heads.

Yes.

Thank God we were the
good girls so that wasn't us.

But what advice would
you give to those people,

because they've
got a hard row to hoe.

We've done it.

[Jen] Yeah, they do.

So,

I guess my advice would be,

and this is probably
advice to myself actually,

back in the day,

is to be more confident
about who you are.

So, don't feel like...

There's no part of you
that is something else.

So, for example,
I like all the visual things.

I like photography and art,
all those sorts of things.

My brain doesn't know that
my eyes weren't going to work,

but I still like those things.

So, my advice would be to just...

encompass all...

of you,

and don't be embarrassed

or ashamed of any part of you,

because it is what makes,

your uniqueness is

what makes you unique,

and special for all of us.

And so, saying that is a great
platitude, it's easy to say.

-[Narelle] Yeah.

-[Jen] But...

[Jen] There's always
going to be challenges,

and things are always changing.

In some ways, you've
got things that are easier.

AI is making a huge difference.

There's lots of apps
now that are really helpful.

But there's always going
to be challenges,

and that's never going
to go away for any of us,

as we move to a different
stage of life, et cetera.

So my one thing...

would say to get
comfortable with who you are,

and love who you
are regardless of,

you know,

any quirks that you may have,

because we've all got
them, let's be honest.

[Narelle] And let's be honest,

I look back at the person I
was when I was 18, 19, 20,

and I didn't accept myself
and I had no confidence.

[Jen] Same.

[Narelle] That's a
learning thing as well.

And people forget
that, I think. You really...

have to learn how

to be confident.

[Jen] Yep.

[Narelle] And it's knowing
what your skills are.

And work on your strengths but
don't forget your weaknesses.

[Jen] Yeah.

Yeah. I think that's a
nice balanced approach.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Jen] Yeah. So, but look,

the one thing that
has always helped me,

always, is a bit of humour.

[Narelle] Yeah.

[Jen] And I can find
the funny in most things.

[Narelle] Yes.

[Jen] So, like my husband and I
were walking home from dinner.

And I said to him,

you're looking particularly
handsome tonight, darling.

He said, well, forgive me for
not taking that as a compliment,

given you just almost
walked into a phone booth.

So, this is like the every day.

And I just think it's just...

funny.

I mean, obviously blindness
or disability is not funny,

but the situations
it can put you in,

or the conversations that
you can have are just the best.

[Narelle] They are!

[Jen] And so, I just love that.

I love having one eye.

I love having a prosthesis,

because it's so much comedy
associated with the false eye.

[Narelle] Yep. I've got one...

One particular

bloke that I knew,

we were at a meeting,

and I didn't realise that

he only had prosthesis,

and of course I'm sitting there

not seeing much, and he said,

Narelle, I'm looking at you,

and I'm thinking, what?

What's Paul going on about?

Then I'd realised he'd actually

taken one of his eyes out,

put it in front of me and it

took me ages to work it out.

And he says, you really
can't see much. I said no.

But everyone around
us must be going,

what on earth are
those two doing?

[Jen] Yeah, it's endless.
It's just endless.

So I think that actually,

for me, humour is a
big part of life, really,

and there's nothing
better than having a laugh.

Not at anybody's expense

but at the situation.

[Narelle] At the situation.

[Jen] Yeah, yeah. So,

anyway.

[Narelle] Jen, how can people
find the videos that you do,

or keep in contact with you
to hear more about your story,

and to learn more from you?

[Jen] Lovely. Thank you.

So, my YouTube channel
is called A Certain Eye.

I've only got one.

And so, have a look at that.

You can find me on LinkedIn.

So I'm under

Jennii, J-E-N-N-I-I,

I wanted two I's in my name if

I can't have two I's in my head.

[Narelle] Yep. I like it.

[Jen] So, Jennii Engels.

[Narelle] Yep.

That's E-N-G-E-L-S. We'll put
it up at the end of the podcast.

Jen, thank you so much for
coming on and being a guest.

Particularly I really enjoyed

learning about A Certain Eye,

and just the things there but,

you know, just the fact you

had to start your own business,

because you couldn't get work,

and I think that is a common

issue for people with disability.

[Jen] Yes. It certainly is.

[Narelle] In other words,

be like Jen.

[Jen] Thank you.

[Narelle] Yeah. What was it?

Life be in it? What was it?

Oh, be like norm.

Life be in it.

[Jen] Yes, that's it.

[Narelle] Be like Jen.

That's another thing
showing our age.

[Jen] Yes, it is.

[Narelle] But, yeah,
so thank you.

And we'll see you next time.

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, dasat.com.au.

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]