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Season 3 Episode 32 - Tiffany Ashdown

Introduction

[Narelle] Hey, hello. Welcome to this week's episode of The Digital Access Show. My name's Narelle Wright, and... we've got a guest from Tasmania this week. If you've never been to Hobart, go and have a look. It's a beautiful place. Tassie's lovely. You know, go to the Salamanca markets. As a person with disability, go and listen, go and feel. Obviously, I can't see anymore. But when I did see, I remember going and touring Hobart and the beautiful scenery just the wonderful places. And our guest this week is Tiffany Ashdown from Hobart. Hi, Tiffany, and thanks for coming on.

[Tiffany] Hello! Thanks for having me.

Meet Tiffany Ashdown

[Narelle] Tiffany, tell us a little bit about yourself, and what you're doing. [Tiffany] Absolutely. Well, my name is Tiffany Ashdown. I am a young Tasmanian woman. I just turned 30 this year, so I'm still claiming... young, although some things are starting to change. Late nights are not nearly as fun. I am a mum to a beautiful eight-year-old, but I have recently put my hand up for a crazy kind of job interview, in that I am hoping to be elected as Lord Mayor of Hobart City in the upcoming October elections.

Why Run for Lord Mayor?

[Narelle] Why are you running for Lord Mayor? What's the attraction? What do you feel you need to do? [Tiffany] I think Hobart has a little bit of a way to go on some of my kind of... passion areas. But generally speaking, I have felt the call over the last... 12 or 18 months to help represent my community. So, I've put my hand up. Like I said, it's a weird kind of job interview at the minute, something that goes for a couple of months and, you know, you do all sorts of kind of... strange things that

you've not done before. But I thought I'd give it a go. [Narelle] What... are you hoping to do as Lord Mayor? What are the changes you'd like to see happen?

Representation, Disability and Climate Resilience

[Tiffany] Well, I'm campaigning for three main things. I'm campaigning for the representation of women, not just in council, but in council decisions. And alongside that, those living with disability to be fairly represented in our decision making at a council level. And climate resilience. Tasmania has a... beautiful, beautiful... It is a beautiful, beautiful island, but we are quite at risk of climate disaster. So, I want to be making decisions that help us be resilient over the coming years at a council level. [Narelle] When you talk about disability, that's obviously my passion. What are the changes there that you're looking at? [Tiffany] There's a couple of things, and I know if we look at... digital accessibility, making sure things like council documents, like bylaws and minutes and agendas, and supporting information is all accessible, but also making information... readily available to people with the disability, and not... putting the onus back on them to contact council and request... accessible formats of things. I'd also love to see Hobart... physically improve its accessibility for people with... varied disabilities. I think Hobart's streets, if you have managed to get down here, can be pretty uneven, and we're a pretty hilly city overall. And so, I'd like to see some changes around... how we look at infrastructure to enable... people with disabilities to be getting around our city, and connecting more with community.

Digital Accessibility in Hobart

[Narelle] You talked about digital accessibility, and making things more accessible. What are the barriers that you're seeing... around that? [Tiffany] Yeah, at the moment, I think there's a range of things, everything from... buried information, where it takes you... a long time actually to find something on a council website, right through to... council papers being flat PDFs at times, and then therefore not being accessible with... accessibility tools that you might use like screen readers. And then... things like council meetings. Currently they don't have any, for example, live captioning or interpreting services. So, you can go ahead and watch the recording later, but of course, that limits your participation... live, and limits how much you can

actually... go ahead and ask questions, for example, at question time, or... speak with counsellors about a certain issue. [Narelle] That's a good point. I hadn't thought of that because, yeah, I mean, I live in Brisbane and I don't go to the council meetings, so I don't even, I don't know whether they're in line. And the reason being, it's the accessibility. It's just another barrier that I'd have to get past. You're talking... You're talking about not being able to access information. What is the legal framework then in Hobart... that should underpin this? Is there any?

[Tiffany] Yeah, I think from memory, our Anti-Discrimination Act says that... communication must be provided... in an accessible format, but the onus is put on the person with the disability... to actually request that accessible information. You and I will both know how busy life is generally. Add in an extra step that you need to ask for, and then maybe even follow up council for, or any level of government for the documents, or things that you need in an accessible format. It's just a whole other hurdle... that people don't have time or capacity for. [Narelle] And... I think the capacity is a big part of it, isn't it? Because I know for me, just in the last two days, the amount of... stuff that I've had to deal with where it's inaccessible, I think if someone... had to do it, and... as just part of their regular day, I think they'd start to get a bit frustrated, overwhelmed. And you know what? You get to, look, I just couldn't be bothered. It's just one more thing to do. [Tiffany] I think everyone kind of has that moment where they have to go to the post office, or they have to go to the bank branch, and it's a little bit different from their normal routine. And that's frustrating for all of the reasons that, you know, you have to go and... maybe find parking, work out how you're gonna get there, and you have to get there at a certain time. And I kind of see the accessibility of council... papers and documents and forms, and all of that kind of stuff as an extension of that kind of... frustration... that you... don't really think about it necessarily until you have to do it, and then it feels like a mountain to climb, because just at every step of the process, you've got something else to do, something... another barrier to get past.

Business Accessibility and Economic Benefits

[Narelle] Yeah. What... do you think... could be done for businesses? I mean, what is the reaction from businesses, small business? Because I know, you know, one of the

things I hear repeatedly is, well, I don't have clients with disability, or, well, I only see one, you know, why would I do that with the extra cost? [Tiffany] Yeah, absolutely. Well, I think that there's... a recognition that we have to have that business is hard... in Australia at the moment. Small business is... is kind of tight because the economy is tight. But in this case, if elected as Lord Mayor, I'd really like to be looking at programs like... rates rebates or grants programs, so that we can actually enable... those with disabilities to be interacting with our businesses, instead of asking, or... requesting, stating that a business has to do another thing, that we can actually support them as a city to... be connecting with the... community of people that live with a disability in Hobart. In Tasmania, we have quite a high occurrence of disability, the highest in the country. So, we're, I know the national average is one in five, but we're looking at one in four at the moment down here in Tasmania. That represents a significant portion of the economy. If we can support our businesses to engage with that community, we're all going to be better off.

[Narelle] And that's a really good point, cause I think... people with disability... want to be part of the community. They want to be engaged with the community, and they want to have their say. With all of that in mind, what are the other benefits that just, I mean, I can think, obviously, tourism. If businesses and if government was accessible, people with disability would come and stay, because it would be easy.

[Tiffany] Absolutely. I think it is, there's that two-part benefit, right? There's the benefit for... the person living with disability that... they get to connect in with community, they feel that same fulfilment. They're not feeling that frustration of... being excluded, and all of the kind of negative emotions that can come from that. But also, from, from the other side of things, our businesses... can access, you know, maybe 25 percent more of the population. Our government can hear from 25 percent more of the population. Our... Just generally speaking, we can be more connected with one another, because we're enabled to be. I think that, especially on a tourist front, the more we can make our tourist attractions in Tasmania, and particularly in Hobart, accessible, well then, the better off we're going to be because as you've said, people can come, they can stay, and they don't need to spend as much time considering, how will I get around? Will this be an experience that is worthwhile for me? If they're making choices about... limited discretionary spending

that they can do, we want to enable that to be, you know, as easy as possible for people to do, and make our attractions... a draw card. [Narelle] I know you're at the start of the campaign. What has been the reaction so far when you talk about digital accessibility? [Tiffany] I think there has been... quite honestly a mixed reaction, because some people have been... kind of aware of this as an area... for a while, and they've maybe felt some pain of things being inaccessible. But for others, there has been kind of a lack of awareness, and almost a, oh, aren't we doing things okay now? And it's been a really interesting process to start... talking with people. And, for example, just pointing out some of the small things... that would make life easier for a person with a disability. It'd also make life easier for somebody without a disability. It would just, overall, you know, a rising tide lifts all boats kind of approach.

Accessible Infrastructure and Battery Point

[Narelle] Yeah. And one of the things with Hobart as well is it is quite historic. You know, it's a major... historical portion of... what happened here in Australia with Van Diemen's Land, and... everything with the... the factories, and Port Arthur, and everything else. I mean, if it was more accessible, what could you do, or, let's turn around, what would you do to make... something much more accessible that's got historical... features like, okay, Battery Point. I've been to Battery Point many, many years ago. But what could you do? Because you said it's quite hilly. So, people with wheelchairs would have issues. [Tiffany] There's a project that's just come before council... that I've been trying to support. We have a parliamentary petition... presented at the moment which people can go and sign, should they be watching this in kind of real time. It closes on the 12th of November, 2026. But the project relates to the Battery Point foreshore walkway. We've talked a little bit about Salamanca markets. Just down the end of Salamanca markets, as you head into Battery Point, there is a park there and the project that's proposed... that's been looked at since 2014, on and off, I think it's 2014. I might have... said the wrong date there, but correct me if I'm wrong. 2014, on and off. There has been this project looked at, to try and provide a foreshore walkway from Battery Point down to Sandy Bay, where we have some of our beautiful beaches, and... we have the...

casino down there, which is where our tourists come and stay. It's quite a big hotel. And so, this project is trying to enable a foreshore walkway so that... you can actually commute between the two areas, relatively flat. And I see this as a... great opportunity for people with varying mobility. And also, just to connect the city, we're going to have a... ferry terminal in Sandy Bay over the next couple of years as well, so it'll actually lift congestion in the city as well if we can get this walkway underway. [Narelle] But because that's quite a, it's one of the original areas of Hobart, isn't it? So, can you imagine adding in... information about the area just in... sign postage that's also recordable, or whichever way you do it, so that people, like myself, that are blind or dyslexic, or colourblind, we can hear, we know what we're hearing, where we are, and think about the context of where we're walking. [Tiffany] And we have other areas that do this really well. We have a walkway, maybe about 10 minutes from the city, that has some of this information along the way. I think we can pick up that... what that's doing really well, talking about, you know, this is where you are and this is the history, and really enable it... to be accessible for everyone in our community. And I can see that being a real tourism attraction, actually. I know... the, what is it, Bondi to Coogee? Is that the area, that walk? I see it kind of being our equivalent of that, although albeit maybe a little bit colder. [Narelle] Yeah. I know in Queensland, there's a small town called Emu Park that's on the coast, and it has the most beautiful ANZAC... War Memorial, and everyone goes there to see it, because it's got the history, it's got the... landscapes, it's got, it's just stunning. And I've only been once. I've found out about it, and... it is something that... Yeah. It just really tells part of our history. In that case, the history of the people from Emu Park that went to World War I, World War II, and all the other, you know, the different wars that they went to, and the impacts on the town. And... it's just beautiful. And it doesn't, it's just adding that little bit of extra that's turned it into a form of a tourist attraction. [Tiffany] Absolutely. I think this project in Hobart is quite an interesting one, because... in some other areas of... kind of the greater Hobart, like the walkway that I mentioned before, arguably you could get around... without using that walkway. But here, the Battery Point one I think is particularly important for the physical accessibility of the city, because if you have visited here, you might be aware that Hobart is quite... hilly, and the area that I'm talking about,

that would be enabled by this walkway, is actually very, very steep. So, I think it's also about not just the tourism component, and enabling people to find out about, you know, the history of Battery Point, for example, but it has a real tangible benefit to... enabling people to actually get around. And possibly those who are not able to make that journey... by themselves to be enabled to do so.

Voting Accessibility

[Narelle] Yeah. How do people vote in Hobart? Is it, you know, for someone like myself, I rely on telephone voting, or someone has to fill out the form for me. What do you, what are the rules? What's the set up there? Is that accessible? [Tiffany] Yeah, so in Hobart, it depends on which level of government you're voting for. So, in the election that I'm running for, it is a postal vote. So, you get your postal pack, and you have about two weeks to get that back in. And then the voting is counted. And we do have telephone voting for those who require it, or... overseas or interstate, or... not able for any other reason to complete their ballot papers. But with that pack, you get a... photo of the candidate and a statement from the candidate, that's about 150 words outlining... what they're kind of about and who they are. And then you... select, it's a one to five... as a valid vote, and then you have up to nine councillors... who will be elected in the local government. [Narelle] But here's the thing. Not accessible is it? [Tiffany] No, I can imagine... trying to get through if you have any kind of... memory loss or processing... kind of impairment, where you... wouldn't struggle to get through large masses of text, for example, would be... quite tricky. [Narelle] Yeah. Yeah, it's interesting. What... would you say, there's Victorian elections coming up, I think there's New South Wales, Queensland, got a bit to go, I think we've got 18 months, two years. I'm not sure at WA, I think they've got a bit to go. Federally, we've got about 18 months. So, there's different, you know, everyone, every state's got its own electoral cycle. But what would you be saying to any person... that's considering running... to be an MP or a Shire councillor, any form of representative? What, you know, if someone came to them and said, what will you do about digital accessibility? What would you be saying to them? The candidates? [Tiffany] Yeah, absolutely. Calling back on that kind of awareness piece, I think, if somebody asks you that question, and you don't quite

know what you might do, it's okay to say that you're still learning, and to ask for feedback on things. Digital accessibility, I've found, even in Tasmania, the levels of... how accessible... the digital communication from a council can vary quite a bit. So, it's okay if you're putting your hand up in kind of any... level of government or any area, to say, look, that's something I might need to look into, but what are your thoughts on it? And go to people with a learning... kind of mindset, and... talk with people. You're putting your hand up ultimately to... to represent people in your community, and you're not putting your hand up because you are every member of your community. So, it's okay to ask for people's feedback on different things, and ask for their ideas, and that's something that I think... makes good elected representatives their... ability to... ask for help, to say I don't have all of the answers right now, but a commitment to work with people... in their community to find them.

[Narelle] What would you say to the voters? The people with disability. [Tiffany]

Yeah, absolutely. I'd say go and look for people. And this is not just people with disability, right? It's any member of the community. But... Democracy is really important. So, go and find the candidate that you think, you know, is going to represent you in the best way possible. And ask them, engage with them, tell them your thoughts and don't stop with candidates. Tell your local members of... council or your local MP, or your... federal MP... what is important to you, particularly, pardon me, as it relates to interaction with different levels of government. Tell them what's working for you, what's not working. Give them the resources, because they might not have that experience themselves to actually fight for your... your needs.

Tell them what they are. [Narelle] Yeah, it's a hard one though, isn't it? It's that extra layer of... things you've got to do, but if you don't ask for it, you're not going to get it. [Tiffany] Absolutely. And... I would just say as well, it doesn't have to be... a big task. If you, for example, are going to... check out your next council's agenda, and it's not accessible to you. Or... You know, it's not in a way that you can interact with it. A one-line email... to council or to whoever it is that says, I can't access blank, because blank... is enough for them to hear. It doesn't have to be... you know, a long page or anything like that. Any small, frequent communication you can have with your elected representatives does get the message across. [Narelle]

Yeah. Tiffany, how can people get in contact with you, to keep talking about this

and your passion for democracy? And what you wanna do in Hobart, particularly with digital accessibility? [Tiffany] Absolutely. You can head to my website, which is tiffanyashdown.com, or you can search Tiffany Ashdown on any social media platform, particularly Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, if you'd like to connect.

[Narelle] Thank you so much, Tiffany. I really do appreciate your time. Now, if you like what we do, please like, subscribe, share, review. And if you do know of someone you think may be... a really, great guest for us, they might have a barrier to accessing some information, or they might have a way that's simple, and effective, please let us know. You can send us an email, reception@dasat.com.au. And we'll follow up because it's really important for us... that we hear from as many people as possible in... the ways that the barriers are. Obviously, for me, sorry, Tiffany, most websites, particularly political party ones, they're not accessible, so I cannot make an informed vote. And that's an important part of the puzzle. Like, subscribe, share, review, and we'll see you next week. Thank you very much. [music playing]