

[Music] [Narelle] Hi and welcome back to The Digital Access Show. Today's guest is someone I've been wanting to interview for a while. He is an assistive technology trainer. Now, I've heard about him, through one, one of the owner of Digital Access Solutions, Mark Muscat. And I've talked to him myself a little bit and I thought, what Adam's got to say is important and I thought I'd share it with all of you guys. Adam Morris, thank you. Welcome. [Adam] Thanks very much, Narelle. Thanks for giving me the opportunity of being on the show. [Narelle] Adam, tell me a bit about yourself. What is your background? Where do you come from? [Adam] Okay, I was born in Canberra. Currently, I live on the Mid-North coast of New South Wales. I'm currently working for a disability employment agency, as well as doing the adaptive technology training that I do you know, on the side. It was until I got the job there. That was one of my main forms of income. But now, it's becoming a little bit less that I've got a full-time job. And I was in, 2019. I was the recipient of the Blind Australian of the Year award. [Narelle] Oh, wow, congratulations, 2019. [Adam] Yeah, that was basically a number of email lists that I run to help blind and vision impaired people with all of their technology of, information, where people can share information and get answers and things like that. So, I've set up a number of lists to do with that. [Narelle] So, Adam, obviously, you've got a vision impairment then being blind to this in Australia 2019, which is, you know, that's one heck of an award there. What's your condition? What led to you losing your sight? You don't have to answer. [Adam] That's okay, basically. I was born premature three months and there was too much oxygen in the human microbiome burned out the retina and the cornea. So I'm basically totally blind. [Narelle] Yeah. So, has that hold you back? [Adam] Not at all, no. You know, my parents were really good. They, you know, encouraged me to, you know, get out there and, you know, do all sorts of different things like water skiing and tandem bike riding and all sorts of things like that. So, you know, I wasn't sheltered at all growing up. [Narelle] That's good to hear because I think, I know for myself having two autistic sons, we never sheltered them either. We expected them to get out and live life. And it's such an important thing for a parent to do. So, feel yourself. What lessons have you learnt from that? [Adam] Basically, I've just learnt to, you know, get out there try things, give them a go if you fail. That's still okay to fail. But then you can, if there's not a way you around something then you move on to, you know, to doing something else. If you, if you're not able to adapt to see, a particular situation, to something that you can do. [Narelle] So what techniques are you using to adapt? This is really interesting. Never thought we'd go into this, but sorry, Adam, I'm interested. What strategies are you using if you run into a barrier of some type where you, you can't do it in what they would call a typical way? [Adam] You know, I, you know, talk to people, make suggestions and say, well, look, you know, this is the way that someone normally does something, but how bad if we try this or that and if, you know, if you're lucky enough to get people that will think outside the box. Then they'll, you know, jump on board and, you know, give things, you know, give, adapt things a little bit to, you know, enable you to do, you know, things, you know, to do. [Narelle] So, you're saying that being able to think outside the box is a very important part of that strategy. [Adam] It is, and it's, you know, really, it is good when you have people that think outside the box and aren't sort of, you know, extremely setting their ways as to, you know, how they'll, how they'll do things. [Narelle] How do you deal with people that are extremely setting their ways? What do you do, Adam? [Adam] There's not really a lot that you can do for for instance, I was working before I started the job in the mail. I was working in a pizza

shop. Certain things that I could do in the pizza shop because guy said, oh, well, if I can do it with my eyes shut, then you can do it. [Narelle] Yep. [Adam] You know, so he was in, in that way, thinking outside the box. [Narelle] Yeah. [Adam] And then for instance, I said, well, why can't I, you know, prepare the dough for the pizzas. So, I know, that's too dangerous because, you know, you've got this thing called a dough sheet, which, where your fingers can be caught. [Narelle] Yeah. [Adam] In between the roll, in between the rollers, but by basically had guards they could use, but don't use. And I said, doing, well, look, could I at least give one batch of dough a go. I said, look, there's ways we can do this. I said, there's talking, of talking measuring jugs for measuring out the water. [Narelle] Yep. [Adam] He said, well, how would you measure at the oil? I said, did get a syringe, like a hundred mil syringe because I think they use a hundred mil of oil in the, in the dough process. I said, look, you just use syringe. There are the guys that do, you know, just pour it into a normal measuring jug and just do it that way. But I said, you could do it with a syringe. [Narelle] Yeah. [Adam] And he said, no, no, you're not doing it. And so the, well, okay, that's fine. You don't want me to do that. You just happy with me doing the things I'm doing. I'm grateful to have have the job and doing what I can do. I wish that I could do more. [Narelle] Yep. [Adam] But you know, you obviously, set in your ways and won't let me try different things to do it. And so, you know, that's just the way it is. You just sometimes have to accept that, you work with what you can. And, you know, you learn to fight your battles and some battles you can win some battles. You just have to move on with, move on to something else because sometimes not everything, you know, it can be resolved. That's just life for anybody. [Narelle] That's what insight. [Adam] And probably most life for us. [Narelle] Because I agree this must anybody, I think it is. Everyone will run into things that can't do. And what do you do? You just find a way around it. Or if you can't, you move on. What I mean, around the house. You know, in your outside your working life. What, how do you manage? What do you use? Do you have a guide dog? Do you use a cane? What are your navigational aids? [Adam] Well, I'm an obviously around the house. I don't have any navigational aids because I don't need them, but you know, I don't have a dog, but I do have a cane. So, you know, going to and from work, I use a cane for, you know, walking from the bus stop to work and things like that. I didn't have a dog a while ago, but where I'm living there, there's not enough work for the dog. [Narelle] Yep. Do you use any particular apps that you know, would be out, that everyone would use? Is there apps that we all use, that anyone driving would use that you use? Or is it only apps that are specifically for people with vision impairment? [Adam] Sometimes I use an app called Next There, or Move It, they're public transport apps. And anyone can use them. They're not just apps for people who are blind have no vision. [Narelle] Yeah. [Adam] They're there for anyone who can use them for, you know, public transport. [Narelle] Okay, yep. What barriers then do you find? you know, in, in your work life, Adam? What, what are the barriers that you, you struggle with daily, you know, even like at home? I don't know about you. I pay the bills in my house. My husband does the shopping because obviously being vision impaired, shopping can be a bit more interesting at times. So, he said you'll do that as long as I pay the bills, but I know what I struggle. How do you do that? [Adam] Well, for the shopping, I pretty much organize the shopping. I use the, I use the Woolies app. [Narelle] Yep. [Adam] And so basically, whenever I run out of X, Y, Z, I scan the barcode. Sometimes the barcode doesn't pick up straight away with the app. And, so, I have to use another app that's a little bit better at finding the barcode. Then once I find the barcode, I can scan

it with with the Woolies app, add it to the cart. And then basically I just get the, yeah, get the shopping delivered. [Narelle] That's people. [Adam] You know, so basically you can, you know, you can do that. I mean, okay, it takes the, you know, for the people who really enjoy shopping. It takes the fun out of going through the shop and walking past something and happening, happening to spot in there. Oh, g, I might try that. Because obviously for me, I buy the things that I run out of. And that's it. So I don't get to see all of the different, you know, different things. Just like with window shopping. You know, it's been, been totally blind. I don't do window shopping. If I go into a shop, I go into a shop to buy X, Y, Z, not to, not to look around, or all the other different things in the shop. So, I think I do. Well, yeah, I might know that I might need, know that I might need whatever else. So I guess in some ways, there's an advantage to it. Because if I could see, I'd probably be buying a lot more different things, not so much in the food, food shops, but, you know, maybe in the, you know, tech shops, like J.B. Hi-Fi and, you know, places like that. [Narelle] Yeah, that's interesting. So, you're still using the same app that everyone uses to do your shopping. [Adam] Yeah, that's right. And with, with, with Woolies, I'm like, with calls, you can pay \$15 a month and get unlimited deliveries if they're over \$50. You know, so if you, and these days with cost of living, it doesn't take long to build your shop up to \$50. [Narelle] Yeah, that's it. That's actually a really good damn, idea there. It's a good tip for anyone, really. What about, like, you talked about not being able to see, like, you go into a shop and the window shopping things. And I, I got to admit, I dislike grocery shopping. The only time I liked it was when I can find unusual ingredients, because I do love cooking. However, I've got a son that loves it and he rings and tells me about them and says, oh, mom, you got to try this, do you got to try that? And I can go and get it. Does it worry you that you can't go and just find those unusual ingredients or, you know, try something different? What do you, what do you do? I suppose it's the question when you want to try something different. [Adam] The thing is, as I say, what you don't know doesn't hurt you. So, I've never had the experience, you know, like you may have had, when you had more site to, you know, be able to do that and have, have that missing. I've never had that, I've never had that to miss it. [Narelle] Yeah. That's a good point. What about, cooking? Look, you do find barriers there. What do you do? How do you manage the cooking? [Adam] A lot of it's, you know, some of it's by smell. I'm not a particularly adventurous cook. You know, what I cook, I cook, you know, fairly well. So basically with a lot of it, you know, say with grilling meat and things like that you can tell by time and by smell. As to whether it's, as to whether it's its cooked or, you know, cooked or not. [Narelle] Which is what most people use anyway, isn't it? The smell. And, and they do use sight as well because, you know, sometimes, you know, I'll say to my wife, can you come and check, you know, whatever it is just to see that's probably like, you know, to see that there's no blood running out of it all. Whatever, you know, we can't tell that. [Narelle] That's a good, yeah. I do occasionally get my husband, my trick at the moment is I use it talking thermometer and my son being a chef taught me the temperature. And I'm going to hits that temperature. I just thought it was cooked. It's, you know, the tools that they're on day for are the kitchen. [Adam] And as, as someone, or as a few people have said over the last, you know, few years. And as bad as it sounds, now is the best time to be blind. As opposed to 15, 20 years ago or 40 years ago or whatever, when they weren't the technology tools and things that there are around there. [Narelle] I agree. I actually, consider myself very lucky because I've lost my sight. You know, compared to you only very recently. It's

only been 16 years for me. And the tools that are there, I've never had to worry about the things that you would have had to deal with. Because the tools were always there for me. So, I'm very lucky that way. What about at work, Adam? How do you handle work? The social aspect, the work aspects on a computer, the accessibility, the, You know, even just navigating to work, navigating around offices. How do you handle all of that? [Adam] Navigating a tune from work is, you know, fairly easy. You know, I mean, I know that if I was sighted, I could just hop off the bus, walk up to the roundabout, cross over the roundabout. And walk down the street to work. But for me, I have to, you know, go down a different street to the traffic lights and then come back. So, I'm more or less doing nearly, you know, pretty much a huge, huge circle to get back to that roundabout. [Narelle] Yeah. [Adam] Because obviously, roundabout sounds safe for blind people to cross that. Whereas if I was fully sighted, it might take the middle or two to cross it, then you can just, you know, jump across the road and be done with it. So you know, it does take us longer to travel places sometimes. And sometimes we just have to accept that, you know, you do have to go around about way that you can't, you know, take the shortest way. Because shortest way may not be the safest way. [Narelle] Yeah. [Adam] And as far as navigating around the office, it's a small office that I'm in. So, I actually have one cane that I take to work with me, which is, the normal aluminium cane that I've got a little, a little telescopic one, which I use when I'm actually inside the building. Because as someone said to me years ago, the small telescopic canes in an office situation make less noise. [Narelle] Oh, okay. [Adam] When you, if you run into a door or run into a, you know, whatever that makes a lot less noise than the heavier normal canes that you use for everyday use. [Narelle] What about on the computer? [Adam] On the computer, there's a lot because of the software that we use. There's all sorts of different accessibility issues. We're using Microsoft Teams, which, you know, it's a program that I use that I'm particularly like it. But it's a program that I use and I have to use it because everyone else at work uses it. You know, for example, to, to find the link, if someone types a message to you and says, you know, this is the link to whatever it is. And they put that in a, in a message amongst, they put the link partway in the middle of a sentence. [Narelle] Yeah. You have to actually find the message, press enter on the message, go across a toolbar, find the sentence, arrow across to the link, then press another key and go down to a menu that says, copy link. Whereas, for a sighted person, they would just, I'm fairly sure be able to see that link in the message just hover the mouse and just click on that link just like that. [Narelle] So, it's not very accessible. [Adam] It's It's accessible once you know how to do it. But it's just a matter of working out how to do it. And a lot of the people that I, that I work with, because our our organization has been swallowed up by a larger organization. So, for example, my manager and all of the team I work with are in Sydney. And I'm, I'm in Coffs Harbour. So, I'll probably never end up meeting with the other people that I'm going to be working with. But they use a lot of emojis and gifs and things like that, you know, in their messages. [Narelle] How do you handle that? [Adam] Not, not things like smiley faces and whatever else, but they might put little pictures of things or, you know, I don't know what, at the moment I haven't, I've just basically been ignoring them and just looking at the text. And I don't really want to say to them, hey guys, can you stop using these gif's because they're not accessible to me? Is that sort of, you know, singling, singling myself out? [Narelle] Yep. [Adam] I mean, if, if they do put something up there, where they might say, yeah, you know, this, this gift is, you know, you know, whatever it is, it might be a, something that's important, then I'll

write them and say, hey, look, I can't read it. You're not going to make a big song and dance out of the fact that they're using these image things and graphics and whatever else that I can't use. [Narelle] Yeah. What other, What other issues do you run into than, you know, with the computer system? Like, it's time-sheets, everything else. Do you have similar issues in all of that area or is it pretty good? [Adam] We don't do time sheets. We, yeah, if you remember, with, me, Mark, you and myself did a video a while ago on, on our platform that we, that we use how it's not accessible. And I've sent it off to the, to the proper people and haven't heard anything back from them, because basically when, when you go to the, when you go to our website, the first thing you get is drag and drop documents here, drag and drop files, you know, and all that, all that kind of thing in it. And basically that's not really accessible to us. So what I've ended up having to do is, getting links from people to different programs and websites that I use that run off that page. And I've put them into favourites. In, in favourites in the web browser, and then I can just get in and look for the link to my, leave link to, this link to pay role, link to, you know, whatever else. [Narelle] Yeah, whatever it is. How have the rest of the team reacted to you? Has it been a very positive, reaction? [Adam] No, no, no, it is a very, very positive reaction. I mean, the, not so much the term that I'm in. because that, because at the moment that I really know that much about me because I'm not doing the same work as they're doing, but the other terms that I put calls through to and things like that, they've been really good. The main the thing is, getting people who are in my office, who may understand a little bit about screen readers to be able to help with, different things like that. You know, knowing how the screens laid out, how it's different for us to navigate than it is for someone with sight. You know, things like that. Because, you know, a lot of, some people that you ask to help, there's, oh, look, I'll help and I'm not very techy. So, that they're not, there's no real point to explain to them that, things work differently of head. Other supervisors in the past, that they've worked with me for a long time. They know that I'm blind, but then they'll say, see the little pencil icon. How did even work with me for three years, and you still keep saying, see the pencil icon. And then, how many times I say, look, I don't know what the pencil icon is. I'm not even sure how that reads with a screen reader. Some people, they're just, in the end, don't get it at all. [Narelle] What advice would you give to people then? You know, when talking to a vision impaired person when working with a vision impaired person. What advice would you give? [Adam] Regarding explaining help explaining web pages and things to someone who they're working with. That's a hard one, because I don't fully understand how web pages work, but, you know, I would, not so much in the work environment, but for people that are coming across websites that they find that all they get on the website is, link, link, link. And the link just says link. It doesn't actually tell you what the link is. I suggest a paper to contact the website developer and explain to them that, For someone using a screen reader, the site isn't particularly accessible. And there are different stand standards. I think they're the W, C, G, A standards. [Narelle] The WCAG. [Adam] WCAG. I knew you'd get I knew you'd, get it I knew you'd, right, but, I'd tell them to do a, do a Google search on that. And then, you know if they could implement their, you know, implement that into into their site. [Narelle] What do, What do you think holds people back from employing vision impaired people? [Adam] They, a lot of people don't think it's out of the box to what the person can do. They think, oh, no, it's going to cost too much, because they're going to need to make all these different changes to things and it's going to cost the company too much, which it actually doesn't because there's an

organization which I know you know about called Job Access that will actually come out and do an assessment of the site, working out what the vision impaired or blind person needs. And then that that will be paid for by the government, not. I mean, the company pays for it first and then the company gets reimbursed by Job Access for the cost of the screen reader or the Braille display or, you know, whatever it is, which, might may, come up to thousands of dollars, but the company does get reimbursed for it. [Narelle] What are the benefits of employing a vision impaired person? [Adam] I'd like to think that the benefits of maybe not just a vision impaired person but someone with a disability is that in a lot of cases, it's been hard for them to find work. And so they're more likely to be more punctual, more likely to care about the job and, you know, put in a hundred percent or maybe even a little bit more than a hundred percent into the job because I know that it's so hard to find the job and then to keep the job. [Narelle] Yeah. In everything you've done over your life, what is the most important thing that you would say about accessibility and computers with from where you started school to where it is now? [Adam] It's definitely come a long way when I was at I was using, basically a talking typewriter. It's obviously, that you know, took a lot of work. You know, it was, it was very big very big huge thing. It wasn't really portable. [Narelle] Yeah. [Adam] And I was, you know, using that, using something called a Braille to Braille to print, which was, and now it would be very outdated device, but it would print out whatever you wrote on the Perkins Braille. Which enabled me when I was working for, when it was telecom back in the day before it changed to Telstra. I was able to print out all of my call logs when I was, you know, making, putting people through the long distance calls that have to write all of that down on the Braille machine. And then, it could be printed out. [Narelle] Where it's today? [Adam] Where, where, where is today? It probably just, you know, put it in an Excel's spreadsheet, upload it to a server. And, whoever needed to look at it on the server would look at it. Whereas before, though, that information would be put into a, those printed pages would be put into a book and filed away. You know, some web. Because the other people are working with me way back then. And the, in the late 80s, we're writing it all into a book. [Narelle] Yeah. Whereas now, you know, I think that. that probably be doing, you know, something like that, that spreadsheet. we'd probably all work on a spreadsheet that would be loaded up and everyone could see the spreadsheet. Everyone could be making changes and working collaboratively with it. And that sort of thing. So, technologies definitely come a long way. And things are a lot more usable and a lot more accessible than what they were. [Narelle] Is there a long way to go? [Adam] When I first started, there's definitely a long way to go. [Narelle] Yeah. So the Microsoft Teams issue was a classic. What else? [Adam] Website accessibility, as I was saying before about, the, about links. We're not sure whether I got to finish that. I suggest people contact their web, the web developer of a site where it just is a link link link link. And, you know, tell them to, you know, look a putting alt tags in. Because that will actually put a label that would be read by the screen reader, which would say link to the link to to this page or link to that page. Or For example, buttons, people don't put text on buttons. Some of a photographic on a button, but not text. So, when you're navigating with your screen reader, or for example, with your mobile phone, it'll just say button. What does button do? Whereas if it's said end button or back button or ne-next page button, whatever the label might be, that they just put the label on the button, instead of just doing a little pretty graphic that might look really nice for sighted people. [Narelle] So, what you're saying is vision impaired people can be independent. Just with a few strategies and techniques.

[Adam] That's right. [Narelle] And the only ones that are holding them back are those people that are not employing the strategies and techniques. [Adam] That's right. That's exactly. That's exactly it because, you know, a lot of vision impaired people, you know, can help people, think outside the box and go that extra step to getting things working. It's just a matter of having people willing to take that extra little bit of time. You know, for example, when I started in the job, I mean now, the program we used for, you know, receiving and taking calls. First of all, they said, oh, look, you have to use a physical phone, which has got a touch screen on it. And I said, look, no, I can't do that. Then, the I rang the IT people and they said, oh, actually, there's an older model phone that we've got that actually has the physical buttons instead of having the nice little graphics on the screen of the transfer button. And that is that the other. Then we discovered that hang on, there's actually this computer app that does exactly the same thing as what the phone or the physical phone does. And it's much easier because to begin with, I was having to have, have the number on the computer. Then I'd have to put one hand out key in the number on the phone keypad while using the arrow keys on the computer to read the number. So, that was very tired and very time consuming. You can imagine when you, when all you're doing is transferring calls. You know, no using numbers all the time. So, then we looked at the looked at the system and we found out that the it could be made to work with some what they call scripts or a sighted people would call the macros. And there's, there's a someone here in Australia that writes these scripts for the program that I use, which is called Jaws for Windows. That stands for Job Access with Speech. [Narelle] Who's that just for people confirmation? [Adam] This is someone called Michael Williams from a company called Imagine Access. [Narelle] Okay, yep. [Adam] And basically, you know, he writes the he writes scripts for the program, which, there's a lot more key presses that I have to do to transfer a call than other people. For example, other people can use the built in directory in the program to just click on the person's name and transfer the transfer the call to them. Whereas for me, I have to have an Excel spreadsheet. [Narelle] Yes. [Adam] Because that because they couldn't make that directory accessible. And like yesterday, for example, the old computer that I'm using the license ran out for Excel. And so that meant that I could read the information, but I couldn't copy the numbers to the clipboard to paste them into the phone application. So, one stage I was using a braille display and another computer to look up the numbers and then read it on the braille display and put, put phone numbers in. And as you can imagine, this using two, you know, two keyboards and everything else. So, that was a real pain. But I ended up being able to save a text file, of the spreadsheet and put that onto the old computer. So, at least that's a work around because there's no way they can get that license back because the contracts ran out. [Narelle] And this is it. It is You know, thinking outside the square. You know, sometimes you have to think it's sort of the square. So, I had to get USB access. You had to contact managers to get all of that done. You know, everything else. But you know, at least, at least I could do that. I think it's on the square. And with the first person, I spoke to a better USB stick. It's not, you can't have a USB stick. We're not allowed to use them. Okay. That doesn't sound right. We normally not allowed to use them, but how else can I get this on so I went to a manager and then she said, yeah, sure. We can get that done for you. [Narelle] So, it's having people willing to think outside the square. That's willing to work with you. [Adam] Yeah. [Narelle] And appreciating the benefits that you can bring to the company, which as you said, punctuality working that little bit harder because you would do

appreciate your work. What advice would you give to any business that is looking at hiring people? [Adam] I'd suggest to them. Yeah, I'm sorry about that. My headset was just saying what I shut the undissable. So, I just had to had to fix that. I'd suggest to them to definitely look at hiring people with a disability because for the most part, they've got good work ethics. Well, you know, in some cases better work ethics and people that don't have a disability, I'm not saying all cases, but some cases. And basically, you know, be prepared to put in a little bit of effort in a little bit of time, little bit of time, extra effort to, you know, teaching someone something because in the end, it will work out because in the beginning with that, with those making those calls and things, I was dropping calls, calls were hanging up and all the rest of it. You know, I just said, look, no, I can't do this. And someone said, oh look, can I just, you know, just wait awhile, just, you know, keep going with it. Don't worry about the calls dropping out. You know, just, you know, we'll see if we can work away around it. And in the end, we did work ways around it. [Narelle] And you're happy and you're loving life. [Adam] Yep, that's right. [Narelle] And loving your job. [Adam] Definitely. [Narelle] Adam, I can't thank you enough for coming on and having a chat with us today on The Digital Access Show. I just the input you've given is valuable. [Adam] Oh, thanks very much again, Narelle, for have, you know, letting me be on the show. And hopefully, you know, what I've, some of the advice that I've given may help either employers or people who are looking for work, you know, get together. [Narelle] Adam, how can people contact you if they want to discuss more about it with you? [Adam] Okay, I can, I'll give my email address and phone number. So, the email address is info@at-training.com.au And phone number is 0414 431 105 [Narelle] Adam, thank you. Been great to have a chat. [Adam] No trouble, thanks, Narelle. [Music]