# Disability Inclusion Insights with ClearTalents

Lizi Green: Welcome to an episode of Disability Inclusion Insights on the AbilityNet podcast.

I am your host, Lizi Green, Digital Inclusion Consultant at AbilityNet. By providing training, support and resources, we want to help address the disability employment gap and support workplaces to become more accessible and inclusive for all.

Join me and my Co-host and colleague Adam Tweed on this series where we interview leaders in the workplace disability inclusion from across industries and around the world.

You can download a transcript of the session from the AbilityNet website at www.abilitynet.org.uk/podcast.

Sit back, grab your favourite beverage and let's get started.

So, welcome everybody, to the Disability Insights Podcast. My name is Lizi Green and I'm a Digital Inclusion Consultant at AbilityNet. And I'm joined again today by my colleague Adam Tweed.

And we are delighted today to be joined by Claire Jones, who is the director at ClearTalents. So, we always kick off our podcast by asking our guests what their drink of choice is today.

Claire Jones: Yeah, so it's very boring. I'm sorry about this, Lizi. So, it is water. But can I just add that had you been here an hour ago, it would have been coffee, which my husband makes every day. We've got like, a machine downstairs in the kitchen. I think launching a spaceship from NASA would be easier. I can't actually use it. So, if anyone comes round for a coffee, they have to get instant off of me. For me, that's like the highlight drink of the day. So, I decided to share that with you. But that's at 10:00, not, you know, 11:00, which is as we're filming it now. And so, it's very boring water, I'm afraid.

Lizi Green: Absolutely. Well, I'm just on tea. I'm always on tea.

Claire Jones: You can’t beat a cup of tea.

Lizi Green: Every time, every podcast, it's a cup of tea. And I'm pretty sure I can guess that Adam is probably drinking a coffee.

Adam Tweed: I'm on the coffee. Yeah. I've taken to grinding my own beans now, though. So, I’ve taken one step back, it won’t be long until I've got the machine.

Claire Jones: Yeah, You're nearly there, Adam. Yeah, we've got one of them as well. We've got some bean grinder or something. They arrive once a month. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Then next you'll be on an artwork course as well, you know, making little shapes on your coffee.

Adam Tweed: Absolutely.

Claire Jones: The world is limitless. Yeah,

Lizi Green: Fantastic. So, could we start off Claire by getting you to tell us a little bit about ClearTalents and your job role there and what you guys do?

Claire Jones: Yeah, sure, of course. So, I've been working at ClearTalents for just over five years now and actually it's kind of really cool because I'm a director obviously, but predominantly my main role is in account management. So, I kind of feel like I'm working for a variety of organisations and no two days are ever the same, which I absolutely love. So, my core role here is to really help organisations with their inclusion, particularly objectives and specifically in the area of reasonable adjustments. So, where ClearTalents comes in is, we’re an online solution and we basically provide organisations with kind of customised inclusion passports so that we can ensure that every employee can share if there's any circumstance or condition that impacts them at work. So, they can get the support or accommodation that they need. And then that kind of then goes a little bit further in terms of helping organisations with them being inclusive. Because then we can give real life insights into their particular organisations. So, we can kind of pull all of the insights we get from the individual passports and then present it back to them at an organisational level. So, they can really see where maybe there are concerns, where there are challenges and that literally governs the decisions they make about strategies, policies and training.

Lizi Green: Fantastic.

Adam Tweed:   
Just on that, I mean you mentioned there reasonable adjustments. For anybody who's listening to this and doesn't know what a reasonable adjustment might be, you've got some sort of examples of those?

Claire Jones:

Yeah, that's a really good point, Adam. Yeah, well suggested. OK. So, a reasonable adjustment is really in its simplest form. It's just about making a slight kind of change or improvement to the way that someone works so that you're kind of removing a barrier. So, some examples of this, if you have anxiety, for example, it would be hugely helpful to have an agenda shared in advance of meeting, because then you can prepare, you understand the aspects of the agenda that you're expected to participate in, and you can attend that meeting very confidently. That's an adjustment. It costs nothing. It probably takes seconds at maximum of minutes to do, but the impact is huge.

So, we did have an individual who used to have this team meeting on Friday morning, and it was like 3 hours and honestly impacted them every day working up to the Friday because they had no idea what they were going to cover. They couldn't prepare for it, and they had no idea when their input would be required. So, it really heightened their anxiety. So that's an example of a really simple and easy adjustment. And they can come in a variety of forms. So, they can also be physical adjustments, environmental adjustments. I'm trying to think there. So, another one actually that's really popular now is having your camera on or off, because in particularly say neurodiversity, you may find it a lot easier to concentrate with your camera off. So actually, just giving people right from the start the opportunity to say it's completely fine and you do your personal preference. We don't need to share why. It's really easy to adjust and really easy to implement adjustment. But does mean that you're then getting the maximum from every participant, be that a team meeting or a training session.

And other ones could include things like the size of the font if you're sharing documents and the actual font that you're using, so that it's easier for people to read. And dyslexia being a maybe a classic example in that scenario. Right through to maybe being a little bit flexible about working patterns because you have a caring commitment, be that for a child, a partner or a relative.

Adam Tweed: So, yeah, it was interesting you were saying there about reasonable adjustments because quite often when we're dealing with businesses and I'm sure you've had the same, there is this perception that a reasonable adjustment is going to be something expensive, that employing somebody with a disability means that there is going to be this massive expense in adjusting workplace to suit them. Whereas actually the truth is and what we find is that most reasonable adjustments are very low cost or no cost at all.

Claire Jones: Yeah, I mean, yeah, absolutely couldn't be more spot on there Adam. Yeah, exactly that there is huge, huge fear that as soon as you mention the word adjustment, as you say, you're talking about significant financial outlay, possibly, you know, significant disruption to the business. But actually reality, exactly as you've just outlined, couldn't be further from the truth.

The mass majority of adjustments and the our solution recommends are free and easy to implement. It is a minority where finance is required. And actually, the Disability Rights Commissioner, did a great piece not that long ago. And they found out that where a cost was incurred, it was typically £75 per individual, which when you think of the cost of recruiting, replacing and retraining, it just doesn't. You just wouldn't even worry about it. And let alone the fact that you're going to retain that person for longer, they're going to be more productive. It's a very, very minimal outlay. Yeah.

Lizi Green: Absolutely. Yeah. That leads us really nicely onto our next question actually, and it's why do you think it's important to employ disabled people? And then also from the experience of your clients, what are some of the organisations doing to actively employ those disabled people?

Claire Jones:   
So in terms of why it's important, I mean, I think hopefully it's obvious it's the variety. You know, if you have the same kind of profile a person in every single team, you're going to get the same output. And if you really want to be successful in business, you have to have the most diverse teams. And obviously that means just embracing and being inclusive in your recruitment and your onboarding.

So, in terms of what organisations are doing to attract a variety of candidates. Kind of some of the best in class actually include an inclusive positioning statement within their recruitment policy. So right up front, as you are applying, they actually ask and actively encourage every single candidate to just take a few moments to create like an inclusion profile.

It's really super quick and simple. They just select statements they can relate to. But what it then means is it enables the recruitment team to have a very inclusive and consistent recruitment process because they can kind of just put these very minor, again no cost in the recruitment scenario adjustments into play. So, it's like an equal playing field. And the way we personally approach it at ClearTalents is that we want to prevent any opportunity for unconscious bias. So, we do what's called progressive disclosure. So, we invite every candidate to create an inclusion profile and then with the recruitment team, the solution actually advises the team at the time the adjustment is required. So, they're constantly analysing that candidate on merit. So, for example, if you had, an adjustment that was required at say interview, then you wouldn't be advised of that when you're in the initial application sift or telephone. But obviously when you then got to interview, you'd be advised that this particular candidate requires ABC and then you would put that adjustment into play. Again, it's often very easy to implement adjustments and it could be something as simple as they have a caring commitment on a Friday morning. So, when it comes to a face-to-face meeting, could it just not be Friday morning? That would be kind of preferential for them. And some people really still are not very keen to travel at peak times. So, if they have a preference that they would like to travel off peak again for a variety of reasons and it could be an accessibility requirement. We just need to make sure that we've covered that and that we've provided a phone number so that because we're getting to this property for the first time, we're confident in doing so. And if we encounter any challenges, we've got a direct dial or someone we can call and explain whatever the challenge may be so that obviously they can work through how to resolve it.

So that's kind of what we would do and what our clients do. One adjustment they put into play during COVID, which was really interesting, and it was to replicate to all of online, all equipment went online during COVID and to replicate the exact same process they'd had before. And they went for teams online. But they actually dictated to the candidate the background that they selected when they came for the interview. And that was a very conscious decision because what they wanted was to replicate being in a room in that same spot, in front of those same people and having the same background, so that you weren't biased by the fact that they had a load of washing behind them or they'd left the Hoover in. So, it was just nice, clear background and you were just analysing that candidate for their skills, their abilities, what they're going to bring to the organisation. It costs them nothing, but it meant that they were being inclusive in their recruitment process.

Lizi Green: Yeah, that's fantastic. I really like that idea. Like you say really simple things to do.

Claire Jones: Really simple, but can have a really big impact because, you know, I'll be honest, I'm a bit of a neat freak. If someone was, you know, in a really busy room, you know, you're just fine, you know, I mean, it just impacts different people in different ways.

Lizi Green: So yeah, I just spent the whole of COVID working in my bedroom. So, I didn't want anybody to see what was behind because it was literally my bed.

Claire Jones: This office had a complete COVID makeover because it used to be my husband's and behind me was like a massive storage that completely floated his boat and totally didn't mind. So, it all got relocated, repainted, you know, and replaced. So yeah, amazing the things you have to do.

Adam Tweed: There was niche job that was kind of created, I think it was an American thing, but you could get somebody to curate the books that appeared behind you for Zoom calls.

Claire Jones: Ohh that is, yeah that's quite impressive though to be fair. That is high level of detail, isn't it? That is good. I like that.

Adam Tweed: Just on that if I can just get one more question on that. You were talking there about the positioning statement. As ClearTalents, as the platform, the tool, are you looking there at barriers, or would you require somebody to disclose or share a specific diagnosis of anything in those situations?

Claire Jones: So, if you have a diagnosis and you want to share, obviously you would absolutely have the opportunity to do so. But really within the positioning statement, what we're really doing is outlining the recruitment process for that particular organisation. So really high level what the recruitment steps are and then we're embedding a link where they then go to create an inclusion profile. And again, they're just selecting statements they can relate to under core categories that apply to every single candidate.

So, things like pen and paper and things like travel, as I mentioned. So, they can then select a statement saying that you know, they prefer not to travel in in peak travel and they can select there's times they'd like to avoid. They can share that they use the telephone in a different way.

that they find that these scenarios are quite stress provoking that they would appreciate having the questions in advance. And whatever it might be, it's selecting those statements, but it's under, as I said, categories that apply to every candidate and every candidate is invited to create that profile. So, it's very inclusive and we would really not recommend a statement around you know if you need a regional adjustment, contact us or e-mail us because you're kind of singling out people and you know depending upon where they are in their careers they could have had prior experience where had they followed that path. It hasn't proved to be particularly positive.

So, by having a statement that just says these are the processes, we want to make sure that everybody gets support they need beforehand and, on the day, please, you know, complete this profile. What candidate doesn't want additional support beforehand and on the day. And then they just select the statements and then that enables that organisation to be genuinely inclusive in their recruitment process and ensure that every candidate can perform on a level playing field. So that's the approach that we would take.

Lizi Green: And so, we've spoken a little bit about some COVID and things moving online, but what other roles do you think technology is doing to drive that disability inclusion?

Claire Jones:  
Well, I think it's just vital, isn't it? Because again and technology is at the forefront of that because it by its very merry, it then removes those barriers. So, it yeah, from my perspective I think it's just vital. I think also from our perspective, it's also the only way to maintain that individual’s privacy and to treat it with respect and confidentiality. Because it's all online, you've got complete control over who can see that information and obviously we'd only be sharing it in cases where the adjustment will support was being provided. So, in the recruitment that would be to the recruiter to make sure they got the support or adjustments in the recruitment process. And with the employee solution that we have, that's to make sure their manager or their HR team can support them appropriately. But by having it technology based, we are confident that every single individual can create that passport and can get that support as soon as you go into any other format by its very nature you what you will definitely be excluding certain user groups.

Lizi Green: Yeah, definitely. And are there any organisations or individuals that you believe are really progressing in disability inclusion in the workplace? Are there any kind of standout people that come to mind for you?

Claire Jones: I think stand out would definitely be. It's got a couple of people there. You've got Mark Lomas, previously HS2, now Lloyds of London, absolutely stunning, fantastic champion, just highly committed to inclusion and has been in both organisations.

And you've got Ollie Thorne at the Page Group and also John Dickinson from Raytheon. They're all fantastic ambassadors and very, very committed to inclusion within the organisations. You'll see them at a whole host of events.

Lizi Green:   
And we spoke a little bit about the pandemic in terms of interviews and things having to move online. But are there any other sort of ways of working that you saw amongst your clients that massively changed say between now and three years ago post and before COVID was the thing.

Claire Jones: Yeah. So, I think, I mean I think we're really aware aren't we that kind of pre COVID I say the majority of organisations were office based, it was all Monday to Friday and we kind of all know the drill. But yeah, the change has been so significant. So, to give you some examples and we've actually got a variety within our client base. So, one of our clients has actually now more refers to the offices as neighbourhoods.

So, you go into the office if you're going to work with your team members. So, it's kind of like a neighbourhood, you're expected to participate, have meetings and you're going in case you need to work and benefit from working with other colleagues. And I really like the kind of phrase neighbourhoods. I love that. If you're going to work independently, you're going to be on online meetings all day. They're quite transparent. Please work from home because you can have a quiet setting there. You can achieve that objective.

We've got other organisations that you know have been very encouraging in getting them to come back to the office because they have all of the equipment and everything on site that they can support everybody. But they also recognise that a lot of people benefited from that kind of quiet home environment that I was just outlining a moment ago. So, in those instances where they've asked them to be more kind of predominantly office based and recognising that there is quite a pool of people that just like to work in peace, they've now implemented quiet zones. So, you know what you get on the train where you go into a carriage and you quiet your phone and just what, you know, just sit nice and quietly there, have these spaces in the office. And so genuinely if you want to go up and approach a colleague, you have to leave that zone and you have to go and kind of talk elsewhere or meet elsewhere because this is, you know, it is what it says on the tin. You're meant to be working quietly.

So, I really like that as well. I kind of mentioned at the beginning of the podcast, I kind of cameras on off. That's a really new thing. So, as we were kind of getting into the pandemic, everyone was getting used to the camera being on and being seen. And it was really kind of quite encouraged, wasn't it, that we all had cameras on and that we all connected. And but more recently people have started to appreciate that actually one size as usual doesn't fit all and that really, we should be giving them the option.

We also identified and this was kind of amazed, unexpected really that when you're in the office, you know, you think nothing to getting up and having a coffee, you nip out and go get yourself a sandwich, maybe take yourself off for walk for 20 minutes. But across all of our customer base, overwhelmingly the data was presenting that for home workers they were incredibly reluctant to take a break. So, they were really really concerned that if they went off for a 20-minute walk you know they basically be almost perceived as skiving not working. When you know really in reality that’s quite ludicrous because we all did it at the office and no one had a problem with it if you nipped out for sandwich 20 minutes. But to nip out from home and go for a walk for 20 minutes for some reason and I get why. But you know it was a really big thing and it was that it's generally escalating into concern because mental health, physical health, really, we all know we shouldn't be sad desk for 8-9 hours a day.

So, we actually kind of fed this back to all of our customer base because it was consistent across the board, huge amount of employees saying they didn't feel that they could and there was a whole variety of responses to that. So, some of them did workshops where they just actively endorsed people take breaks. In one organisation they actually froze everybody's laptop for 5 minutes every hour, which I thought was like I'm still a bit, I kind of thought I'm really impressed. But at the same time, I would find that quite frustrating if I was in the middle of doing something.

But you know, to be fair, they couldn't demonstrate their commitment more. And obviously one would like to think you knew when this 5-minute break is.

Others just said please, you know, put breaks in your working day that suits you, but actually, you know, genuinely governed by it. If it comes up as your break step away, you know, take a breath of fresh air. So yeah, we did see quite a lot of difference and I think actually quite a big increase in productivity because there's a lot of time lost in travel and people were happy to invest that in work because they quite like the fact that they could maybe tweak their hours a little bit to suit them. So, on the whole, I would say there's been an awful lot of good come out of this new way of working and certainly they're kind of work life balance. We are far more in tune with that now because whereas before we had this ethos of, oh, we can't, you know, our team can't work from home because of ABC, now we realise that that really isn't the case.

Lizi Green: Yeah, absolutely. I think it was a real eye opener for those people that said they can't. There was a lot of businesses that were resolutely we can't have anybody work from home. And then COVID just flipped that, and they had to and then they realised, ohh, yeah, we can.

Claire Jones: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Adam Tweed:   
I think one of the things that you brought up there that was interesting to me was this notion of transparency. So, if you're saying to people, you want them back in the office, then be clear as to why that is. I think there is this kind of, it's very easy to push back against somebody who is just saying, well, we want you back because we have an office, and we need it filled. Whereas if you're saying to people, come in because we want you to do collaborative work, stay at home, if you want to do the kind of focus work.

Claire Jones: The independent work, exactly. And actually, that's a really nice blend and you know, and I think it's kind of something that plays to everybody's working week. There are times genuinely and of course you need to work as a team, and you really benefit from those insights. As you're saying earlier, having that inclusive that diverse team brings a whole wealth of benefits, but there is equally just as much benefit and sometimes working independently quietly. You know you're more productive in that setting with certain tasks. So yeah, having that transparency and then that's where the majority of organisations are a mix of the two, they're a mix of at home and on site. And we even now, we had to kind of well didn't have to, but we chased like evolve our inclusion profile. So, they also have like a workstation one for the office and for home because now they work between the two. And actually, you know the organisations want that insight to make sure that both environments are fit for purpose. And so, we provided that kind of context and those and those insights for them. But yeah, absolutely. I think don't ask them to come into the office for the office’s sake. Similarly, I think a lot of organisations have downscaled the size of their offices and reap the financial benefits associated with that because they don’t need all the teams in 100% of the time. You know, we've got several clients I think that have now released floors worth of space office space because they just don't, you know, they never 100% capacity five days a week. They don't require it.

Adam Tweed: Yeah.

The other thing that you were talking about there were the, the cameras on and cameras off and I don't know whether we're in will include this because I'm throwing you a bit of a curveball here. But we have struggled a little bit with that because we've had feedback on certainly webinars where we've had an invited audience that they want our cameras on. So even if we've got somebody on the panel who's uncomfortable with that, we've got an audience that is potentially saying, well, I want it because I want to see your expression or I read lips. So therefore, I need that of impact. So, I think I don't really know where I'm going with that in terms of a question to you so much as it is that notion of 1 size doesn't fit all and being inclusive for one person is, is potentially you risk tipping the balance the other way for somebody else.

Claire Jones: Yeah, I think I think again it's nice to have a blend. So, you know I've been on webinars and all the participants cameras have been off and I find that quite hard because you can't see the reactions of anyone that you're talking to. So, for me that's at that you know I can't engage with anyone I can't kind of read anyone's facial expression and, but I'd be very happy with the on off as suits you rule. So, you know if percentage doesn't do on the camera, fine. But if percentage are comfortable to have it on there's a speaker or you know a Co-host and a panel. I would really appreciate those that did had it on. You know I've attended webinars when my camera has been automatically turned off. I don't have a choice. You know, I'm not, I'm not a presenter on participant and therefore it's off. And I just wonder obviously, yeah, if there has been any kind of discussion, I mean it might have been in that scenario the presenter’s preference was actually I'd really rather not. You know see 100 people looking at me, I find that quite overwhelming and obviously if that's what was requested then that's absolutely fine. But I think particularly in scenarios, in the scenarios where I do think it's really important are meetings and training because actually for that individual if to have their camera off means that they can take on board more of that training and they can participate more with confidence than really what is your primary objective to be able to see that person's facial expression or for them to be effectively trained and in a training setting then I would categorically do it. And the same again with a meeting, you know people will participate a lot more productively and have valuable contributions if it's in a format that works for them. So, we did actually have one organisation, we had a team where there was a particular team member and they used this like team meeting, this is pre COVID to be fair, team meeting in the office certain day of a week. And a certain individual didn’t like that, and they didn't like that all the room were looking at them when they made contributions and actually the adjustment it was agreed before COVID was that they would attend via teams. So even though the rest of the team wanted to be in the room, that's fine, that's your choice. But this individual didn't want to be in the room, and they were aware that because they were so anxious about it, they were having kind of a negative impact on the vibe of the meeting. So, they came in remotely, they turned the camera off, and they just think the contribution was so significantly more positive because the format suited them, and the team really respected that they were quite transparent about that. So, it was just better for everyone. But yeah, as you say, I think, I think best not to dictate but certainly to us, but those that can, it's helpful that they do. Again, for a trainer, you do like to see some of the participants and reactions when you're delivering that material.

Lizi Green: Absolutely. OK, so we are at our last question now and we will see Claire, whether you have prepared this one or whether you're going to off the cuff it. I'm waiting for someone to off the cuff this question.

Claire Jones: You know I would not. I don't to upset you Lizi but no, I'm not going to off the cuff this one.

Lizi Green: I don't think anyone's going to off the cuff this one.

Claire Jones: You've limited it to 10 words, so you've got to think about it, haven't you? Can't just wing that anyway.

Lizi Green: So, using no more than 10 words, can you summarise one piece of advice or tip on what you have learned since creating a disability inclusive workplace?

Claire Jones: Mine would be. It's better for everyone.

Lizi Green  
Nice. Very concise.

Claire Jones: That was 5 words wasn't it, Lizi? Do I get bonus point for getting to the point even quicker.

Lizi Green: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. No, I think that's definitely just sums it up really, really nicely. Great, fantastic. Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Claire. We've really, really enjoyed our chat with you.

Any last words Adam?

Adam Tweed:  
I was just going to say Claire, if people are interested and want to reach out to you to ClearTalents, what's the best way to get to you?

Claire Jones: Yeah, perfect. Thank you. If they want to go to cleartalents.info, that would be the easiest way, or they can e-mail me direct claire.jones@cleartalents.com.

Lizi Green:  
Fantastic.

Claire Jones: Thank you, guys. Thank you for your time. Thank you.