**Transcript of Accessibility Insights webinar discussion with Jenny Lay-Flurrie, Microsoft’s Chief Accessibility Officer**

Robin: Thank you everybody for tuning in to this the first episode

of what we're calling accessibility insights.

It's a monthly chat I have with world leaders influences champions of accessibility

and digital inclusion,

and we're going to get the show rolling with a brilliant first guest.

Well, I am extremely pleased to have Jenny Lay Flurrie,

Chief Accessibility officer of Microsoft.

You're only responsible for all things to do with accessibility right across the whole globe

and everything that Microsoft is doing so no,

no mean feat there. No pressure.

Not at all no pressure!

And we're going to touch upon some of the brilliant things that Microsoft has been doing

and probably will be doing in this space.

But yeah, thank you very much indeed

for being the first victim in this new series of events where

we hope to talk to the absolute top people

when it comes to accessibility inclusion across a number of sectors

and where better to start than with Microsoft and it's been a busy few months.

and years for Microsoft, so let's just start before we get to some questions more specific questions

about how Microsoft has really being making an impact in recent times

and particularly perhaps if you know what the Covid angle is to you know,

what you've been doing differently.

So we've had you know 20.04. Windows 20.04

coming out recently with some accessibility improvements.

Hence, we've had the Able Summit that we'll talk about in a bit.

But what for you are the highlights in recent

months and what you're particularly proud of Microsoft having done and if there's a you know,

Covid-19 angle then please do tell us about that

as well. Jenny: right happy to. So, thank you for having me.

It's always good to wake up -because it's eight o'clock here in Seattle.

and the afternoon back home in the UK.

So I love it. It's a chance to have a cup of tea and have a good conversation.

Robin: It’s the home of Starbucks. You need to have coffee.

Jenny: I have a mix and I do have actually it's my Edinburgh mug today that's filled up this morning.

So yes, all good don't don't worry PG tips all the way

and I will say I think accessibility during these times I think gosh,

It's never been more important to think about accessibility during these times.

I think while accessibility’s clearly been a priority

for Microsoft, as many other companies, the limelight that the pandemic has put on the need

for Access

I think has been pretty humbling and one hell of a sort of learning journey.

So you're maybe to touch on that first. I think the pandemic came down here in Seattle

pretty early - it was right at the beginning of March

and literally there was a text message I sent to Bell who is my ASL interpreter here on the zoom screen (points to Bell: work from home tomorrow!),

and I haven't seen her since . Normally me and Bell are very much together in a room six feet apart at least,

you know, sometimes a lot less than that.

So it's been a very quick and study fast ramp. We had to learn how to work remotely.

This isn't something that we're used to doing. We had to really learn that skill set.

I will tell you that was its own journey

and I think every individual has been on their journey sort of figuring out how this works.

What we saw from the broader perspective was that the disability

answer desk - which is our free customer support offering

for folks with disabilities to contact us

whether you're a company or an individual - the volumes there shot up. They doubled pretty much overnight.

We've been steadily running at two to three hundred percent of volume expectations,

and we've been running this for seven years.

Robin: I was one of those customers working from home.

Jenny: welcome. And and why did you call Robin give me a sense?

Robin: There was a particular issue with updating because what I mean,

basically I when we were updating to the next version.

of Windows it was just taking a very long time and

I know it's faster than previous updates,

but it was at the point in the update that it hadn't got to the point

where narrator could be activated to say that there's

so many percent left.

So I did it via Be My Eyes,

which is a brilliant app where Microsoft is one of the specialist Support options,

and I just could point the phone at the computer screen and she told me don’t worry, you know things are happening you're almost there.

So it was just reassurance on my part,

but I have used it for other things in the past that were far more technical

and guess what? They can just jump on, just you know hit the run,

you know windows R in MRT

is it for remote support? And they're

in and it that is special that is incredibly special

but to do it via a couple of taps on your phone actually is really, really good.

So that was a brilliant advancement.

It's been a few years since you know, you became part of Be My Eyes,

but that to me is my preferred way in ,definitely.

Jenny: I I love that.

I think that's exactly the kind of scenario that we put disability answer desk together

for and Be My Eyes it was always,

you know, it's kind of how is this going to work? We were first to go with it.

Years ago. But we find that if people used Be My Eyes to come through

they're able to resolve their issue much quicker

and get what get what they need

and get back up and running

. What we saw holistically with Covid and the pandemic was a ton of folks reaching out

for I would say a lot of basic needs - they were updating a computer.

How do I use this? I'm new to Microsoft Teams.

How does this work with JAWS?

Narrator, Zoom, whatever it may be we saw a ton of that.

We also saw different sections of the community contacting

us and have done before and I think we saw a lot of input from the the deaf community

and hard of hearing and I think that's totally logical

when you when you think it through the deaf being

- and myself included - very reliant on provision of capturing transcripts.

How do I get my sign language interpreter moving the right way?

What’s in the mobility sector?

And the number one product that everyone wanted to talk about was Teams,

you know Teams being one of the communication vehicles that has had significant growth

as a result of the pandemic,

but also we were able to accelerate

a bunch of great features in there to power people

up - AI-provided captions being top of that list.

So we you know, I think it was it was good for us to…

And we're still in the middle of this, you know responding

as quickly as we can getting those features out which is the joy of products and technology,

which is no longer are we waiting three, five, seven years for an update.

We can update every month sometimes quicker than that.

Sometimes a little more than that. And I will say while there's definitely been some issues that we've all learned.

I learned a lot we didn't test

for this scenario before Covid hit

and a lot of the baseline that we had in place with accessibility

which has really been a priority in their company

for a number of years now

and we've had a gosh, 20 year plus history with accessibility

but really our focus in the last few years of infusing it across a company

stood us in good stead meant we have the foundation

so that we could lift quicker.

So yeah, it's been one heck of a ride

and my gosh very humbling.

Robin: And that's been amazing that you know,

the virus has kick-started this whole new area of remote working ,remote meeting, remote working,

you know collaboration wise, you know that have been challenges,

you know for people with disabilities in particular if you had support around you,

you know that they’re at arm's length now and that does have a challenge,

you know for me rather than just saying to someone in the office

oh, can I borrow your eyes for a second?

You know, you have to fire up Be My Eyes, for example,

but that legacy that impetus is going to have a long tail.

I think that the new normal may well include a much higher usage of these collaborative platforms.

So all the investment and all the improvement

and the huge uptake of something like Teams is going to be a legacy of the

virus that people are going to benefit from for

months and years to come don't you think?

Jenny: Yeah, I do. I do. I think you know,

it's very hard. I think there's a pull, a natural human pull to go back to the way it was.

I actually don't think that is possible anymore.

I think when you've had this long a duration,

but also there's been a ton of good

while I hesitate to say that because there's so much tragedy and pain,

you know, my my own sister works in the NHS, she had Covid.

It's just small impact compared to what so many other.

I mean this is anxiety-ridden but I think from a technology perspective.

It's definitely driven a ton of innovation.

I think the there's risks with that.

I think if folks aren't thinking about accessibility the impact if you don't. If you do

put out something that's inaccessible is far more profound

because you don't have the ability to just grab a pair of eyes. I don't have the ability to grab a sign language interpreter

and understand a video if it doesn't have captions.

It's a whole complicated process

now and so I think there's ramifications

but a ton of the features that we're seeing in Teams - things like hand-raise,

which is such an easy one where you can just put your hand up you press a button

and it makes your focus your picture visible that you want to say something

something like that was put in on the back of feedback of ‘I don't know when to butt in’. I don't know

when the next pause is going to be

and I'm scared of overlapping other people will let me just put my

hand up. That's got really cool implications

for cognitive neurodiversity, let alone deafness and other disabilities.

So yeah, I do think that there's a lot. With every scenario like this one you do get an innovation

boost and I hesitate to say that because again,

I know so many people have had it. This has not been an easy time,

but it's definitely true. Robin: Yeah,

absolutely and there were a lot of hasty decisions that had to be made

when people suddenly had to work from home and thank goodness that one of the default options,

you know, the Microsoft option

when it came to something like collaborative working

and team meetings and that sort of thing was nice and inclusive.

So that's absolutely brilliant. You know, it's not always been

the case that the webinar platform of choice

or the online meeting platform of choice was inclusive,

but you know Teams is definitely one of the rising stars in this area and thank goodness,

and I know how much development

and you know the road map for Teams is a bit of an eye-opener isn't it? So that's really really good.

So if it's okay with you, I'm going to switch now.

We asked for questions to put to our guests and for you.

In fact, this is from our one of our accessibility consultants on our accessibility team

and they have watched almost all of the sessions from the Ability Summit.

That was yeah very recently a week-long event.

And they wanted to know what for you were the highlights from the Ability Summit.

So maybe you want to tell people what it what it was if they're not aware.

Jenny: So Ability Summit. Well kudos for watching all of them!

There were about 23 breakouts, video, two plenaries and a lot of product demos and charity fair and career fair.

So there was a lot of content. The context: Ability Summit is the the one annual

conference that me my team run. It had very small beginnings.

It started 10 years ago when I was chair of the disability group,

That's really how I got into Accessibility

when I came to Microsoft in London 15 years ago was building joining the deaf community

and then building the disability ERG from

there and I pulled together this conference 10 years ago with, gosh, 80 people in the

room. People with disabilities talking to one another.

You know, that was my theory of let's get people together to have good conversations.

What's working? What's not, how do I talk to my manager? That sort of stuff.

And then last year the the event grew. We've embedded and grown the focus over the years.

We had about 25 hundred folks in the room last year for the physical conference.

And then this year we literally turned it to Virtual with about eight weeks to go again.

Just the timing so we learned a ton about how to put on an

accessible event , a successful virtual event

and the shocker for us was just the interest. We had almost 7,000 people

as a part of that that registered and joined from 95 countries.

Just some of the impacts of these virtual events the reach - it's far bigger.

So it wasn't just Microsoft people they were actually mostly external folks speaking

and I would say there were there were definitely a few highlights.

I spoke with our CEO, I spoke with Leah Katz-Hernandez who's a phenomenal force of nature in the company.

She's in the CEO office. She was previously at the White House

with the President Obama administration.

And so that was just fantastic to see their dynamic and that conversation.

I loved Panos Panay who's our chief product officer.

Robin: He's a force of nature.

Jenny: He's on his own and then he brought a special guest.

He brought Michael Phelps along to talk about mental health,

which is so important at this time and Michael Phelps,

I mean crikey and that was so much fun to record and get that session out there.

I also have to give kudos to Amy Heard

and who's our chief financial officer. She’s so black and white,

you know, we will work with our suppliers and we will make the next thing,

you know, she's just again another force of nature if you like,

but I also really enjoyed at the end of both of the two-day keynotes the hour long

segments a couple of individuals share their stories with disability. One was Fela Neece who is a relatively new hire to Microsoft.

And she shared her journey with lupus

and seeing her disability

as a strength and the other was corporate vice president in HR

Chuck Edwards who shared his journey with MS.

And neither of them Fela Neece shared hers previously , for Chuck.

it was the first time even

though he's been living with

it for a number of years. And I think to see leaders really leaning

in and talking about areas that aren't talked enough about: lupus and Ms. I think was particular parry but there's tons of great content out there - it’s all online. It's all on our YouTube channel.

So yeah, check it out. That's the other good thing with virtual events.

You get a lot of you can go and watch it afterwards.

So it's all online. Robin: Absolutely.

Now, I'm going to sound really kind of socially maladjusted here,

but for me, it wasn't the kind of the people stories.

Although powerful as they were, it was the demos of the

accessibility features of office, of Windows, of Xbox

so definitely check that,

you know, whether you're into stories or practical how-tos then yeah go to the YouTube channel.

You can get also go to aka.ms/abilitysummit and aka.MS is a brilliant domain.

I just love that domain. I love that URL AKA dot m s go therefore

for all things Microsoft but / abilitysummit will give you the highlights of the event as well.

So accessibility in action, you want to say a little bit about that

what that what's involved with that?

Yeah, there are a couple of things that we announced during the Ability Summit aside from a lot of the product goodness,

which there was a ton of and one was the Accessibility in Action badge which we , about a year ago.

In fact a little bit more, we started putting out we call it the 101 badge.

It's the internally for employees they could take about 90 minutes of training

and get a badge.

It's not hard. It's in fact,

I will tell you that my internal version included cartoons from Back to the Future

because we are that nerdy

and they were just fun to take, but the test at the end was hard.

I mean you couldn't rush through it. You actually had to consume the content

and it walks through a lot of the basics that not just from a soft skill perspective,

but also from a nerdy skill perspective it walks through a lot

and we got a wave of feedback from our employees saying

when are we going to get an external version

I can share? So we published that in May.

So this is really we’ve taken out some of the

Microsoft info that might not be relevant externally.

It's a goodness that just we took some of that out

and really just popped it online

for folks to take, leverage, use, get inspired by if you're building your own training because ultimately accessibility can

and should be learned and pop that online so yes do go take it.

Yeah, it's not just a practical.

It's also about an inclusive culture within an organisation.

So yeah, really really good.

Great, I mean any other highlights for you

either from the summit or what AbilityNet?

I mean, Microsoft is doing now

I can clearly talk to what you've done.

No, I'm I'll leave that to you but I

would say the other one the other one that we did put out.

There was the evolution model.

This was really one of the questions I get a ton is how are you driving accessibility at Microsoft?

you know we’re a he of a hundred

and fifty thousand employees plus a lot of contractors and vendors and suppliers

how do we ensuring that accessibility

is part of it not just windows

or Xbox or office or power BI,

but how are we making sure that it's infused into a hiring process and marketing,

you know, you'll have seen some of the Microsoft ads over the

last few years all throughout the process

and and really this the rocket science here is not really rocket science.

It was based on a maturity model actually from it started with a maturity

model that we got from Carnegie Mellon University

and from Level Access,

which is an accessibility consultancy that used to be called SS Bart

and they put out an accessibility maturity model in 2015.

We grabbed both of those. We wallowed in them the accessibility

leadership team of which It's crossed the company.

So these appears in every division.

We then sort of sat and created our own and then we've been using

it for the last four or five years and every year tweaking it and growing it.

And so we put that online for again for companies primarily to look at.

Well, how do I bring accessibility into the company?

How do I ladder it because you know,

it's not an overnight thing this takes time.

And efforts we put those business models out.

We were also able to you know aside from Teams features you the great

wondering ability some it was really just making

sure that the team's free products are also receives AI captions which has

since then launched again captioning just being

so critical during this time. Independence aside from anything else.

We were also able to release all the incremental improvements to Narrator

and some of what's happening with the Windows set as well.

So yes, there was a lot of goodness that that we shipped in May

May is always our crazy period, May, June where we ship most of our stuff

Brilliant now you mentioned power BI there

and there's going to be a lot of corporate listeners,

you know who are going to be watching this because you know AbilityNet.

We're very fortunate to have been offering our services to try and improve their you know,

certainly in the accessibility maturity model is something

that we very are very strong proponents of now,

you know gone are the days when accessibility should have been considered or piecemeal,

you know or project by project. You really do need to embed it in the culture of an organization

and we've been very fortunate to have very strong links with many many organizations.

So many are going to be listening now Power BI is such as I said,

it's a hidden gem within Microsoft,

you know many people unless they're potentially in the right

team within an organization might not even know what that is.

So do you want to quickly brief people on because it's an absolute brilliant set of tools, isn't it?

Yeah, I mean it really the it kind of does I love that the product name is very descriptive

to what it actually does and

what it is essentially does is give you the ability to interrogate

a lot of data present that in beautiful ways

and so it really just gives you the power to architect how you want to portray information

whether that's Maps graphs tables and highlighting and digging into the key facets of that data.

So it harnesses a lot of harnesses a lot of the format principles that you will

know and hopefully love from Microsoft

but also the Big Data principles

and the ability to really dig into that

and accessibility has been part of how they've been building it

and which is being a Learning Journey.

I mean, I think that's one from an engineering perspective,

you know clearly Excel as one other

and a different level data environment has always had some core

accessibility within it which we've grown incrementally over time.

This is a very visual model.

So we've had to take a lot of that wisdom

but also figure out how can we make environments that are very

predominantly visual accessible

and there's been I'll tell you some of the conversations have been just fascinating to be a part of

as we really think through those scenarios.

And so we continue,

you know, the team would say they're continuing to work on it to ensure

that every every single scenario is that way,

but it's a great toolset it really is

and you'll see a lot of the information that we have on some of

our websites is actually powered by Power BI

Absolutely business insights like you never seen before across a range of you know,

just sucking in data and providing it in there, you know dashboards, you know to die for basically.

In the closing minutes. Let's look to the future.

Not asking you to divulge,

you know Gems or kind of corporate secrets,

but where is Microsoft headed particularly

in the area of accessibility and inclusion?

What are you most excited about in the months to come?

Yeah, I mean I think some of it going back to

what we talked about in the beginning a lot of my focus right now is

making sure that we have an inclusive recovery.

And I think that couldn't that's just

so incredibly important and vital right now as more and more return to the workplace,

but it's an adjusted workplace

or need to continue to work at home

as we know so many folks with disabilities

will need to while sheltering stops.

It doesn't reduce the risk that we covered so we're very much.

Focused on how can we ensure products like Teams

But not just Teams we work through the list of features that

we've collected over the last several months

and we're slowly getting those out quickly getting those out.

So, you know one is about inclusive recovery making sure that

people with disabilities are a part of that recovery

and they were empowered through technology to get back into the workforce.

If that's the route that folks want to go.

I think aside from that. I think we've got you know,

the core fundamentals that we continue to push on with our Windows Office Xbox.

I think gaming has been a fascinating another one with with covid that we've seen

so many people turn to gaming

as a source of fun and an achievable fun in the home

and we started this path with the Xbox adaptive controller.

Now, we're seeing accessibility really being woven into the core of Xbox,

but also, Games and so how we can get more of those out.

I think the other real big Avenue is making sure that we continue to Power Products

like seeing AI which has now taken over 25 million images.

We're expanding the country's the the team's continuing to drive,

you know seeing AI forward

and how do we continue that path

but also soundscape and other products soundscape actually

when you You think about which is all about navigating the world

through audio again targeting blind low vision.

That's who it's been designed with

and for there's Amos Miller who's been posting a lot of content on this.

There are some really important scenarios

there as we think about navigating pavements

and streets when you don't really want to be close to someone,

you know, yeah, really interesting situation said beyond that you

With the focus on AI continues,

we actually while it this wasn't as a result of Covid.

I do think that I love how sometimes things happen for the right reasons.

Our latest round of AI for accessibility grants

all went to mental health projects.

Mental health being clearly top of mind

for us all at these times.

And and so just how can we leverage AI to really power up more

intelligence about how we're using our time

to sort of provide that relief of having to take every single action,

you know, letting technology takes some of some of that burden

as we go forward and just the data that's needed here to move forward.

So just continuing to think about how we can leverage technology here

and and honestly if there's anything that I say

is that's been really important

in the last few months is the power of your feedback.

I would tell you that that list -

I've got five hundred features and bugs

that I'm really working through that

have come in in the last several months.

That's come from folk saying, hey I would love to see X,

I would love to see this.

This didn't work quite right for me

every bit of feedback you give goes into the process

and then we work with every single engineering team to motivate through

and so I would just say your feedback

whether it's to disability answered desk

any of the other channels we have is absolutely paramount

and please keep reaching out.

Let us help whether it's through be my eyes or DAD

but also given tell us what you want.

Yeah, there's a brilliant feedback hard built into Windows as well.

And so I'm going to I'm going to put you on the spot here.

I'm going to throw you a question or a request.

So there will be other brilliant guests on this monthly series of kind of chats.

Who what would you like to say to the next person that we will be

interviewing will put their your question

or comment to them whether it's a top tip or whether it's a request or or even a question,

what would you like to say to the next,

you know, very prominent person in the area of inclusion or accessibility from from you to them?

I would say accessibility is not an area that we if we're going to

move forward particularly in these times.

We’ve got a partner and work together. This isn't an area where

we compete it's not an area . We've all got

the healthy nerd’s engineer passion to drive the the industry forward,

but I would say that most of the folks that I think you're talking about.

We talk a lot we talk all the time.

So I would say well we're going to do together.

Good.

What can we what we partner on?

What can we what can we motor on and I think that's really really important during these times.

So yeah. Yeah put that on the spot.

What can we do together .

Wow?

Because it's it is it's the

when you combine the Brain Trust that we have

and I will say that that's been the other just really humbling thing during this.

These times it's just been that we have all been chatting on a continual basis.

And yeah that camaraderie and grounding of what we do and why we do it has brought us even closer.

That's such a brilliant answer. I mean something that sprung to

mind when you were saying about that,

you know, you were talking about Soundscape earlier

and I use that on a regular basis and either you went to Bose or they came to you and said,

you know, what can we do together in this

area because I use Bose’s sunglasses that have built-in audio

and that have a built-in compass and soundscape not only tells me what's around me.

But as I move my head those instructions about how I can get from A to B.

What I'm passing what's directly in front of me pans around my head.

Thanks to your partnership with Bose in the fact that there is a sort of

audio AR capabilities within those sunglasses.

So that is absolutely brilliant. Yeah,

I know. I'll just say, you know, one of the great things like

Seeing AI is on iOS, Soundscape is on iOS.

We actually Apple just announced that the Adaptive Controller

will work with their gaming platform coming

up and and by the way the same level of partnership with

Google on multiple different areas as well.

So it is it isn't something we just talked about this something we do

and I think it's because accessibility is something for you.

Need it. I don't want you to be worrying about

what platform what when environment

I want you to be able to get to the technology you need and get going

There’s certainly been an awful lot of doing at Microsoft in recent years and months.

And so I'm really excited about you know,

what's going to happen for the rest of 2020

and for the rest of the decade

to so thank you very much Jenny real pleasure having you on thanks

for being our first and I really look forward to the series

and to see what Microsoft is going to do.

Thank you very much. Thank you for the partnership.

Thank you for the time and I will go

and get myself another cup of tea

you go and have a lovely evening and I'll speak to you soon.

Thanks a lot.

Bye.

Robin: So please do tune in next month guys.

We have lots of brilliant guests lined up.

Including Caroline Casey of the valuable 500, Christopher Patnoe of Google,

Jennison Asuncion of LinkedIn

who also founded Global accessibility awareness day.

We all know about that.

So, please do subscribe to our newsletter on our website

subscribe to the podcast subscribe to the feed the channel on YouTube

and we look forward to seeing you next time.