**TechShare Procast – Episode 1, Transcript**

Hello and welcome to the very first TechShare Procast by AbilityNet, the future of accessibility and inclusive design is right here. I'm Steven Scott from RNIB and

[new speaker] I'm Robin Christopherson of AbilityNet.

[Steven] Good to be with you again, Robin. Hello. How are you?

[Robin] I am really, really well, Stephen.

[Steven] Thanks. We are so excited about TechShare Pro coming up and we have lots to talk about. Uh, tell us, first of all, your thoughts and your hopes for the upcoming event. We know they have been stunning events, going for several years now, with there's so much to cover. We will try and do our best to give you what's really going to be hot from TechShare Pro this year.

And we'll discuss that in a moment. But for me, I think AI is going to be a really hot thing indeed, and Procast itself - a birth of a brand new podcast here, powered by AbilityNet, a major event here, and a great opportunity to, of course, talk about the future of all of this technology. And of course, inclusive design, which is a massive part of what this year's event is all about, isn't it?

[Robin] Absolutely. Now tickets are sold out, guys, apologies. You know, that said, um, we, we're full. There is actually a waiting list, which you may or may not want to get onto just in case people aren't able to come on the day. But we are going to be here delivering for you a lot of what's hot in the upcoming event, which we will actually be getting sneak previews about in advance, but also…

We will be live at the event recording. Lots of audio, lots of interviews. The highlights from the event that we will bring you in a post TechShare Procast as well. Oh, it's going to be so good, isn't it? We're going to get all the TechShare Pro news right here on that. Let’s bring in the man who knows all about it…

The guy who makes it all happen. He is Mark Walker from AbilityNet. Hello to you, Mark.

[Mark] Hi there.

[Steven] Listen, it is great to have you here on the very first TechShare Procast. I want to get you on because you are here to tell us about the history of TechShare Pro. As Robin said at the top, you know, this has been going on for a number of years now.

What makes TechShare Pro so popular today?

[Mark] Well, I think, um. What we're hitting is, is a wave of interest in, in accessibility and inclusion in diversity and in general. And we're in the third year of TechShare Pro. TechShare Pro is actually something that RNIB has been developing.

and has a global footprint in in lots of other ways. But the project that we'd been working on, in the last three years has been focused very much on the people who were building and delivering digital services and products, and very much [00:03:00] looking at how they embed best practice into their day to day work so that we helped make the digital world more accessible for all.

So the broad theme is where are we going in terms of digital and, and disability and inclusion and accessibility. And then the nuts and bolts, if you like, is what are we going to do about it so that we get there. Um, in terms of digital teams, people with all sorts of roles are gatekeepers on projects and programmes, project managers.

So those are the pros. We're focusing on the digital community who make the stuff that we consume across our daily lives. Absolutely. So that's pretty much you've summarized who it's for that certainly a good cross section of the people that will be attending the event.

[Robin] If you had to say who the content that we're going to be providing in this podcast - and stay subscribed guys - so that you make sure that you get all the content as it comes, who could this podcast be for, which is going to be delivering the meats, the [00:04:00] gems, the, um, the low down from the event itself?

[Mark] So, just in terms of history, we started off with about a three quarters of a day with a hundred people in the room. Last year we got a whole day with 180 people in the room. This year it's two days with 250 people in the room. So the scope of what we're covering is grown enormously. If I tell you about who's sponsoring and supporting the event, you'll begin to get a sense of the scale of what we're trying to do.

So as well as AbilityNet, we have Google and RNIB delivering the event overall. And as gold partners Google is hosting the event this year. They see that as part of their sort of global picture of promoting inclusive design. The other partners on board are Barclay's CRO for technologies, Lenovo, Microsoft, and Sony.

So that gives you some sense of the sort of global picture, again, that we're trying to bring in the different tech interests. And then we've got supporters like the IAAP, the International Association of Accessibility Professionals. We've got Scope, the largest Pan disability charity in the UK, and Uber providing some content. One of our winners of our Tech for Good awards who do accessible gaming. Just an incredible range of things you can imagine that those people are bringing to the party gives you a sense of what people are gonna learn.

The themes probably explore it a bit further as well. So there are two days. The first day is all about leadership, accessibility, leadership. And what do you need to do to move the dial in your organization? What do you need to do to make the change, to win the case, to get people bought into the idea that this is it, and some joining all together. We have some amazing people speaking. So the accessibility leadership session includes the head of accessibility for Apple, the head of accessibility for Google, the head of accessibility for Microsoft globally, all three of those. So just an incredible range of expertise and knowledge that we're drawing upon.

[Robin] That sounds absolutely fantastic. And we've actually got, um, sneak previews. We've managed to catch up with a number of people from those organizations, and we're going to be listening to some clips of larger interviews that we've had with them that we are bringing to you even before the event has started.

One person, Caroline Casey, who is keynoting the event we aren’t going to be bringing to you. So I think we absolutely should talk about her now, Mark. So do you want to tell people about Caroline and what she's going to bring to the party. This is a great example of where we move beyond the nuts and bolts of digital accessibility where we may at one point have been thinking about, you know, how do you make an accessible date picker?

[Mark] How'd you do the tech stuff? Caroline's coming in from way outside that picture. She's leading a campaign called valuable 500. It's a global campaign, kicked off with support from Unilever to put disability on the agenda of the Top 500 companies in the world. So to get them committing to discussing disability at the top table and implementing change in their organization to ensure inclusion across the piece.

And not just in terms of digital, but across the whole of the culture change that that would require. So. Big picture, really inspiring. Um, if you aren't able to come, then check out her Ted talk. It's, it's fantastic. What she's going to be telling us at the event is, you know, updating us on the programme she's been working on.

They launched it at Davos at the beginning of [00:08:00] this year, telling us more about who's already signed up and their progress. But the other thing we're going to get from it, I think is that real inspiration as to what the changes that we're trying to see. What, you know, what is it we're trying to do in the world?

To make the world a better place. She’s great for that. She's really inspiring, and an amazing speaker. So I think that one's just gonna set us all off for the rest of the two days in terms of really, you know, more power to the people and really getting us motivated to learn and share and pass on knowledge between the community that's attending the event.

[Steven] Okay. We have lots of tasty morsels for you ahead of the event, but I want to pin you both on one thing that you are really looking forward to taking away from this event, someone that you are going to hear from or something that you think we are going to learn as a result of being at TechShare Pro.

So Robin, first to you.

[Robin] I'm going to take that literally. I'm going to swing by Google to head office. And - nobody listen to this - but I'm going to take away some sort of Google hardware!

[Mark] The one thing I'm really excited about is meeting people that are inspirational and you know, a lot of the panels and that general theme about from the event will be diversity and how important that is, and many of the speakers there and the experts on the panels have disabilities themselves. So it's going to be brilliant, educational and inspiring. There are examples I can pick out of the programme, but I'm genuinely interested in seeing who turns up and meeting them and engaging with them. And I feel like we're building a community.

This is probably the best place in the UK to pull together that community [00:10:00] that, you know, there are lots of people interested in this topic but we're really pulling together some amazing people from the UK. The thing we're really doing differently that we didn't do last year, I think is the international flavour.

The opening panel includes speakers from the US, Israel, Europe, and Norway, talking about the legal carrots and sticks and, and a global perspective on which is more valuable, a carrot or a stick. So that gives you a taste of just one of the sessions, and how big the picture is that we're painting for people.

The people in the room are there because they're converted to this cause. We’re pulling our people together and we're giving them a chance to connect with each other and inspire one another and build on new ideas and connections which they can take away and do more.

I think the community and the people in the room, I'm really looking forward to that buzz. I know that we're going to take away a real sense of purpose and renewal of interest in this area. So that’s a big thing for me.

[Steven] Well, before Robin gets the morsels out of the oven for us, who enjoy, you are going to hang around Mark?

You're gonna come back a bit later and give us some more information before the end of the podcast. So we'll have more from you later. Mark Walker. Thank you. Okay, Robin, let's get our morsels out on the table shall we and measure up here.

[Robin] Bit saucy for a tech show! But actually that's a good segue because Mark was discussing a potential secret sauce that Microsoft have that have helped them with a real laser focus on leadership in accessibility. He was talking to Jenny Lay-Flurrie, their chief accessibility officer, who will be providing a video presentation.

At the event he asks Jenny, what is the [00:12:00] secret sauce?

[New speaker, Jenny Lay-Flurrie] Microsoft's been in the accessibility gig since the 90s. Specifically 94 for those that remember - I mean, it's been going a long time and that's actually when our employee groups started as well.

Our first group was in the 90s, um, Blind group and Huddle, which is our deaf community. And, parents of kids with autism were our first groups. So there was this technical strand and there was also a people strategy on employee strengths. And I would say, you know, clearly in that time, the people, community’s just gone from strength to strength.

It's amazing to look at that 10 years. I started our internal conference, the Ability summit, it'll hit its 10th anniversary next year. 20 people in the room 10 years ago, and there were 2,500 at that thing this year. So that's very humbling to see how that's grown.

I would never claim that we've been perfect in that complete two decades. We’ve definitely learned a few tricks. I do think the combination now is working really well because when I had the chance to move into this role four years ago, I brought the two together very, very consciously.

And some of that's because I was the chair of the ERG (employee resource groups). But it was also very much a customer centric approach to accessibility. How could I really lean into the expertise that we have in the company? You know, we have vast expertise. Learn from that and get feedback from that. And then make sure that that actually directs and focuses our efforts on accessibility, from a more technical and engineering perspective, whether that's digital or physical.

And both are in the remit. So I think our approach right now is, is really if there's any secret sauce that we have. And so it's very people focused and very customer focused and very customer prioritized, far more than it ever was. I do remember times where there was a lot of ‘why should we do this’?

Or what's the ROI? Which is always a terrible place to go. Um, you know, that's a trap by the way. Get out of it really fast cause that's not the promise and potential with it. Accessibility is about how you can design for all, through the lens of disability and create way better innovations.

I think there's definitely some scenarios where you've been in the Y. We're not there now. We're just not there at all. I know. A, your, the, the leadership, it's phenomenal. You know, the CEO was actually the sponsor of the ERG before he became a CEO. That spread, the leadership was deeply committed.

There's no question of why should we do this? It's more a question of how and what, and you know, the hours that we have in the day and what can we get done in them. And to make sure that we do the right things in the right order.

There's always far more, because accessibility is immature, right? There's so much beauty in it, but it's immature. There is a long way to go. There's some brilliant things out there. Stuff that we've done, and stuff in the industry. There's some brilliant things out there.

But there's way more ahead of us in the roads behind us. It is about making sure that we're going to deliver products, environments, services that are gonna help accelerate that.

[Robin] Really interesting. The key takeaways for me there, Steven, are that, you know, it's a killer combination that Microsoft have got there.

They've got a really diverse workforce that they have harnessed. They've brought together all their different disability groups into the ERG she mentioned there, that's their employee resource group. So they brought them all together. And joined up thinking is really important and that group can now input into all of Microsoft's products, their processes, that sort of thing. And that's absolutely what accessibility leadership is about. And that's a main theme of that panel, I'm sure is going to be about leveraging your employees. And the other side of it that she mentioned is killer combo. The second element is creating the right tools.

And Microsoft have absolutely done that over recent years as well, the right tools internally to help build the right products. For external use by customers. So yeah, I think that's brilliant.

[Steven] It is. But then she talks about not focusing on ROI, return of investment. And I'm not sure I would necessarily agree with that.

I mean, I get the carrot and stick approach and I understand all that, but at the same time, if businesses don't make money on it, and as in, you know, they don't see the value, financial value, why would they do it?

And I think it's because she's saying, look, people, people are what matters. And we'll hear that a little bit later on when we talked to Paul Smyth of Barclays. But yeah, so I think it's because she wants it all to be about the customers, all about the people internal and external. And you know, maybe she's tried to go down the business case route before and not got the same leverage internally. I don't know. Microsoft are definitely a different organization than they were five, 10 years ago. So, yeah, I mean, we know about the purple pound, don't we? And it's going to be one of the topic sessions at the event at TSP.

So absolutely, massively important, but, but really interesting. Now Mark then asked Jenny about what the impact of the mainstreaming of accessibility into devices, et cetera, might be having on the industry.

[Jenny] It's the promise of inclusive design. You look at the adaptive controller, the Xbox adaptive controller, that's absolutely just a beautiful example of inclusive design.

I remember those guys coming into the hackathon, which is my favourite week of the year. And they came in with a charity with a veteran. Who had his rig that he custom built, but it was dodgy because it was custom built.

And that is his source of therapy. His source of fun. I mean, to say it mattered would be like the understatement of the year. And our job was really to lean into what he needed to learn from that and to build, and not just the product, but the packaging that went with it. You know, we ditched the plastic clamshell and the horrible packaging for something that was one ring finger pull, all because we leant into him.

Then another set of NGOs and charities expanded it even further. An accessible, inclusive design just makes products better for everybody. So that was that accessibility controller, designed for a disabled veteran, but actually loved by able gamers.

It's a really, really popular product for mainstream gamers. It just means that they can up their high scores, they can just perform better with it. So that's a really good example, a very tangible example of how inclusive design is actually just good design. I've been seeing two customers for years on radio, on podcasts, and more recently on television that this approach is so important.

Businesses have to think about everybody, not just the disabled people. Yes, of course, that the products have to be accessible and that's the key point. But they can be accessible to everyone. I mean, look at what Microsoft has done through ease of access settings, whether it'd be large text for example, or high contrast, or even if you look outside of ease of access, dark mode that's been put into.

All of the computers nowadays and phones as well. These settings can help everybody and that's the key point. Making it mainstream. It can help everybody and therefore make your product more available to more people. Absolutely. Apple have upped the accessibility settings out. They've taken out of general in iOS, put it on the main screen, and that's a reflection, like you say, of the fact that everybody should be seriously considering customizing, optimizing their devices.

We're all different. You know, you shouldn't take something off the shelf and just accept all its default settings. That's just, you know, that doesn't make sense. And when you're designing products, you need to build in those changes, those settings, and make sure that what you provide out of the box is going to be as inclusive as possible.

And any changes they make on top of that need to both be possible. And also they need to be available in the broadest sense of the people who need to go the extra mile. Like me as a blind screen reader user, for example

[Robin] So if you want to hear more from Jenny, then in the feed later on this week, we will drop the full interview. It's around half an hour. Much, much more goodness in there is really well worth the listen. So watch this space for that coming up in the feed.

So now we move on to hear from Paul Smyth of Barclays. He is head of digital accessibility for the whole of Barclays. He is on the building an effective accessibility champions network panel - definitely one to watch out for. And I asked him about doing accessibility the Barclays way.

[New speaker, Paul Smyth] At Barclays we've been involved in a valuable 500 campaign about the disability inclusion revolution, putting disability right at the top of your group board, committing to, it's about being serious, committed, and it brings a multitude of benefits.

So, you know, I speak to lots of businesses, daily, who are waking up to the fact of this. So whether it's because new laws dictate you have to do something. When I think of access with leadership, there's only sort of two tiers. There's kind of organizations that are quite new to this and asking the basic questions about where do I start?

How do I get an expert or the things I should focus on? How do I do reasonable adjustments to staff? And then there's the more sophisticated organizations, who are looking, how do we build kind of champions? How do [00:23:00] we go beyond the kind of legal minimum around checklists that we failed or more about customers that we’re failing.

Everything we change or build or buy in our processes and not just, you know, bolting things on, in terms of new services or features that we offer to some customers. But actually for everyone.

[Robin] I mean, absolutely. There's, you know, different organizations are on different stages of this ongoing journey. And you never get to the final destination. It's always something that you need to work on. And you know, you've been championing accessibility within Barclays for many years now. And as a result, I'm assuming you've been instrumental in this because it takes an awful lot of effort and you know, Barclays don't push anything live without having factored in accessibility and are prioritized at the core of everything that you do.

And as results, you've just got better. Products that are more inclusive, you know, for a really diverse audience, as you mentioned before. But it can't have been easy. And one thing that I usually touch upon is that, you know, an accessibility champion, however potent and however good their superhero powers are, you know, it's not enough.

You need to have an accessibility champion in each department. You need to have an accessibility champion in each team. Each member of that team also needs to own inclusion as well. So how much of a challenge making this an ongoing process that sticks has that been ?.

[Paul] Yeah, I mean, I think you're right.

It's a real uphill battle. You know, when you work in a large corporate and there's a whole bunch of priorities and regulations going on. Disability, I guess it teaches us to be very resilient and resourceful. And I think that kind of comes through actually leading accessibility and some of those kind of attributes and traits…you know, that the superpowers kind of really help because I think you're certainly right, Robin. Most sort of making sure that everyone understands what accessibility is and plays their part. You know, this isn't an us and them that we have an accessibility person and maybe only one that worries about and doesn't. I think around accessibility it's really sort of shifting that culture that this isn't a sort of a Iegal have to, but it's a kind of commercial and more want to, and I know Barclays is shifting our culture. We've often talked about these kind of three-pronged approach that we need to really build empathy and compassion.

If we've got offshore teams building stuff, they might not always see the Barclays customers walking through our bank branches as they do come in different shapes and sizes. So we need to sort of inspire hearts. So, you know, the wow moments that we get things right at the pain points that we don't, we need to kind of educate heads about all the lovely accessibility resources out there so that people [00:26:00] know how to consider and deliver accessibility, inclusive design.

And when we need to enable hands – ie, very practical tools they can actually apply in day jobs. I need to kind of think about and then and do differently. So I've missed something about just raising the bar around culture or accessibility

And not just having one champion or one accessibility lead, but again, lots of senior leaders who understand this, who are all visible and vocal in saying that, you know, this isn't just lip service, but it's really important.

I think for Barclays we’ve got a public statement in about being the most accessible FTSE company full-stop, which is great. Kind of linked to our values about opportunities for customers, clients, colleagues, to kind of rise. It’s a very long term challenge to make sure that we weave this into the DNA of the organisation.

So again, it's not just this low hanging fruit of doing a pet project over here. Certain pockets of disability community, but actually how we apply this to everything, all our products and services. And you can imagine, it takes a little bit more time because more of them are a little bit more challenging.

[Robin] And I love that. Well you’re just so good at getting the message across that triumvirate of heads, heart and hands. And you know what that means in reality for, you know, an organization and for every employee, every member of that team. And you know, the passion that you have I'm sure has played a big part in really shifting the needle.

So the key takeaway there was that, yeah, it's all about people, not checklists. And I think that speaks to Jenny's point as well. You know, the ROI, it's about numbers and stuff, but let's make it about people. I think that's what she was saying too. And then I asked him as well about what he thinks increasingly built in mainstreaming of accessibility of inclusive design that we were talking about earlier is having on the landscape.

You mentioned earlier on about how accessibility or inclusion is being baked in into almost every product these days. And it's absolutely the case. You know, Apple, I would probably argue, has kind of led the way and you know, brought everyone along with it and that, I don't know about you, but that really strengthens the argument to say, look, you can't turn around without seeing accessibility in front of you everywhere these days. And, you know, if the big names in tech and digital are taking it this seriously, then us as a digital organisation absolutely need to, to make sure that our products and services are fit for purpose going forward in a digital first platform agnostic, you know?

[Paul] Proliferation of tech world that that we're definitely living in. Yeah. I think Apple and others, you know, Microsoft have really stepped up and I think that sort of rising tide lifts all ships. Yes. It is really valid point. There's a lot of organizations out there, but really differentiating their services when we doubled down accessibility and a lot of other businesses kind of standing, you know, watching thinking cripes, how do I do that? Which is why it's such an important time to get involved in the accessibility community. You mix disability profession to professional. So of course, lots of what we're doing with the business disability forum and new benchmarking tools so that at an organizational level you can look at, here's the sorts of things that being awesome accessibility you need to focus on.

And then which few things do you focus on over the next few months? So you have some great new resources at an organization level. And of course, the individuals for this is what, as the experts, [00:30:00] um, you know, I think events like TechShare Pro are important when people can come along and learn, share, grow from others.

For me it's sort of building the textbook for what an accessibility expert would need to know. As more and more organizations are looking externally and saying, you know we need to get an accessibly expert in here to help us with this, to help us with our digital presence to be more accessible.

[Steven] So basically what Paul Smyth is saying there from Barclays is if you don't get on the accessibility train, you're going to be left behind.

[Robin] Absolutely. Don't stand by and watch other organisations accelerate past you. And you know, it is a very competitive environment now. It's brilliant that all of these organisations are vying to be leaders in this space of accessibility. And digital inclusion and diversity more broadly. You know, we've got the valuable 500.

We've got people wanting to be disability confident employers. It’s a really sexy space to be in at the moment, and if you don't get with the programme, then you're going to be left behind. So, yeah, Barclays is a brilliant example of how to really invest in doing things properly.

[Steven] And another company that is doing the same in terms of an investment in accessibility is Google.

[Robin] Yes, absolutely. Our Annie Mannion has had a quick chat with Chris Patnoe, who is an accessibility expert at Google, talking about the many accessibility related projects that they have been involved in over recent months and that they're going to be talking about at TechShare Pro.

[New speaker, Christopher Patnoe] So Sound Amplifier, an Android app for accessibility. It helps people with, with these Android devices, boost important sounds and filter out background noises using the Android phones. So it can help you in a noisy room.

For example, users can customize frequencies, amplify certain important sounds, like the voices of people that you're with or the voices of a speaker at a lecture, and filter out background noises. What's exciting is in the past year, we released a second version, which we find to be much more intuitive and easier to use.

[New speaker, Annie Mannion] And I understand that Live Transcribe has recently added two new features. Sound event detection and saved transcriptions. Could you describe how these work?

[Christopher] Yeah, so, Live Transcribe is probably one of our most popular new applications. We released it in the past year, and the goal of it is to provide the option for someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.

They have a good sense of what's being said. And so what will happen is the phone will take the voice that that's being spoken and we'll just provide a transcription of it right in front of you. It supports 70 different languages, and if you don't want to talk back or if you're not able to talk back, you can even have a particular conversation by typing a response back.

So it's not really the replacement of an interpreter, but it's, it's a good next best thing. So that's the core of the product, the things that we added in our recent update has the ability to save a transcript. So you can take the conversation, like a school lecture and save it, take it out, and start to work with it.

The thing that's been, that's a pretty focused use case, but the thing that most people really are to be able to appreciate is in addition to transcribing speech speeches, you can see like when a dog is barking or when someone's knocking at the door, they're called sound events and you can see the sound events and they're little dots with squares in them. Bottom of the screen in big different colours, you could recognize them and it tells you when it's applause or if there's music in the background or clapping or laughter. And these things are important to understand what's happening in the world around you.

[Annie] Definitely. And something that we’ve been reading about is Project Euphonia. And it has a great story behind how it came into fruition. Can you share what this is and how it came about?

[Christopher]Yes this, this is a really exciting user research. It was invented by a man named Dimitri Kanevsky and Dimitri went deaf at one year old, and he was raised in Russia, so he learned English by reading and writing phonetically. So his spoken pattern of English is not typical. Sometimes it'll be high, sometimes it'll be low. So it's this combination of deaf and Russian accents, and it's sometimes a little difficult to understand at first. So we created a model that allows him to be understood very clearly just by recording his voice, using different expressions.

The team recording his voice train this model on it, and now we can understand him as well as someone who's worked with him for a long time, sometimes better than me. The neat thing about this is even though we designed this for him, the core technology of Project Euphonia can help anyone who has a non-typical speech patterns.

So one of the things we're trying to do by talking about this is to have more people contribute examples of a speech and that will allow us to create a model that works for more than one, more than many. Eventually we got to create a model that it works for everyone or nearly everyone. We don't want to have to have different models.

We want to have our standard model be good for everyone. And what's cool about this is we can even start expanding into non speech patterns. So say, for example, there's a person with ALS, they can make utterances or even physical, physical expressions of their face, like understanding these utterances.

We allow the technology to trigger something, or like a word or even one of my favourite clips is there was a fellow watching a sports game who is able to trigger a sound of a horn cause he's excited about what happened in the game. So here's someone who can contribute in real time to the excitement of what's happening with us within the game.

[Steven] It sounds like what Chris Patnoe was saying there, Robin, is that it really is the time that tech giants are taking accessibility seriously at everyone getting on board, which is fantastic. Now, I know there's a longer interview going to drop onto the TechShare Procast feed soon. What else is Chris talking about?

[Robin] Yes. We covered three products or projects that they've been working on in the accessibility space since the last TechSharePro, and, yeah, the fuller interview covers other things like Accessibility Scanner, which is an app that people can use to test the accessibility of apps in Android, for example.

And there's also a font which they've been working on that they released for Google docs and more broadly, which will optimize legibility. He says that it's not a dyslexic font, it's just better for everyone, but is it kind of is, but yeah, really, really good. So listen to the fuller interview.

[Steven] Fascinating stuff. Okay. So what's next? What are, what else would we got to whet people's appetite for the upcoming TechShare Pro event?

[Robin] Annie has had a quick chat with George Rhodes who is now with the Home Office, but over the summer before he joined them, he was very, very busy reviewing hundreds and hundreds of public sector websites because of the legislation that we now know is well and truly in effect.

[New speaker, George Rhodes] Originally, this started out as a question for myself, really just sort of see where we were at with accessibility statements across the UK. And because I was, I was involved in my previous role with trying to support many of the local authorities in Kent in preparing for the new regulations. I had some time on my hands and wanted to sort of see where everyone else was getting to across the UK.

So I had a few initial questions that I wanted to answer. How many statements are out there? What different approaches have been taken, and does the presence and quality of an accessibility statement correlate at all with a more accessible site? And also, one of the things I did was map where I found statements because I wanted to see if there were any geographical areas that sort of demonstrate the hot spots for accessibility.

[Annie] And what were the actual findings? Iif you could just say the top line results.

[George] So I've recently just updated the results. So we've got a version 2 of the original results, which were taken as a snapshot.

Prior to the first deadline of the regulations - this work was completed over late August and September - I looked at 601 public sector websites. Those covered all local governments in the UK, County and district/ Borough level. All police forces, foreign rescue services and [00:40:00] universities in the UK.

So I'm close to 601. We only had 23 compliance statements, which is less than 4%.

[Steven] Okay. So 4% Robin. Hmm. Interesting number. So for people who aren't aware of what we're talking about here, this public sector regulation that has come into effect 23rd of September just gone. That was the end of the year of grace in which public sector organizations right across, you know, the NHS, health, higher education, obviously all local and central government needed to get their act together and make their websites compliant. There are some exceptions, like if you've got a massive back log or archive of PDFs, then you don't have to do them all in one go.

You can prioritize and kind of eat the elephant just one little nibble at a time. But part of the requirement is having this accessibility statement. We all know about accessibility pages. It's usually linked to from the footer right at the bottom of a webpage in tiny photo sized font, which obviously isn't good signposting for the audience that you're catering for with that page, but this statement needs to be much more than that. It needs to clearly say amongst other things, how compliant your website is. Now, if only 4% had an accessibility statement, the other 96% I can guarantee aren't compliant yet, because you can bet the first thing you'll do once you've reached compliance is shout about it.

Of course, accessibility statement. Yeah. And there's no guarantee that the other 4% that do have a page up there. Some of those might say, well, we're working towards it, or whatever. In fact, I can guarantee it. So that gives you a really good flavour of the level of complaints that's out there in the public sector.

And guess what? The public sector is often better than the corporate sector that have kind of more singing, all thinking all dancing [00:42:00] pages, et cetera. So yeah, it's pretty desperate out there guys, and that's why it's really important that we prioritise digital inclusion. Now, the fuller interview that's going to drop in the feed has a second lot of data. He revisited all those pages, all those websites, and he did even more. The total now is 1,441. And guess what the new percentage figure is for overall compliance? Well, I'm not going to tell you, but guess what? It's not 100%, but we do find out in the podcast that's coming. Don't worry.

[Steven] Absolutely. Oh, that's good. Okay. Well we can hear that number, but yes, it's not going to be 100% guys. Okay, what's next, Robin?

[Robin] Well, I spoke to our accessibility consultant, Abi James, about these new regulations and how important it is that public sector websites need to get on board.

Now you're going to be on the one of the expert panels that's going to be about regulation to deal with accessibility. Now actually, it's going to be super engaging for some really good reasons. Yeah. Do you wanna tell us about what you're going to bring to this panel.

[New speaker, Abi James] I'm really looking forward to being part of this panel just to be in the room because we've got some great experts, people from government, universities, and from the corporate sector as well.

And we're going to be talking about public sector regulations, web accessibility, regulations. As you say, the law. You know, sometimes you hit your head against a brick wall when you try and read these regulations. With people thinking, Oh, well we don't want compliance, culture, et cetera. But we have a great opportunity at the moment because for the first time in the UK and actually across Europe, we have laws that require certain organizations, just the public sector at the moment to, comply with web accessibility standards or work towards those standards, but also really, really critical is they've got to put that information on their websites and say what they're doing about accessibility and how they're gonna help their users. So actually, yes, it's boring law stuff, but from the perspective of an assistive technology user like myself, like you, for the first time ever, we can go to a website, go to our local council, go to our schools, go to our universities, go to our hospitals, look on a particular page, and go, actually I'm going to have a problem with trying to access the information, but look, there's an email address, there's a person I can contact and they can give me help because that's what's part of all these regulations for the first time. Organizations have to think about their accessibility, say how they comply, say how they will help people who have difficulties.

And then there is that bit of that stick as well. If actually, if you do have problems, who to go to in the government, and get support, make a complaint. And potentially we've got a route to make sure that those organisations do comply with [00:45:00] these regulations going forward. Absolutely.

Legislation isn't necessarily kind of a super interesting topic. It's been a limp twig at best rather than a big knobbly stick, which would compliment the juicy carrots that we talk about as well. And I'm really hoping it's going to shift the needle and we're actually seeing that aren't we in the public sector?

There is actually an impact already, you know, two decades after arguably, you know, the legislation to do with website cause disability has come into effect. We're actually now seeing a shift in the landscape because of this very legislation. And yeah, it's just we're now having those conversations.

People are actually starting to go to their senior managers. They're going to their chairs. They go to their boards and saying, we've got to take accessibility seriously. This is why I'm also likely, we'll hopefully have in the roomduring the panel, we'll have people who are willing and able to share their practice and share their questions, [00:46:00] share their experience.

We've got to learn from each other. My comment, I will make it anytime I talk about accessibility, is that it's a journey. It's never complete because technology changes, let alone, you know, getting all those texts in that compliance standards, it's always gonna change. It's always something you've got to be striving to do better at.

And these regulations are part of getting people to be open about their accessibility and open about what they can and can't do. I'll start in those conversations, which is great.

[Robin] So there you go. I told you it wasn't boring. I think what we talked about there, which is having a clear channel by which to complain and having a named body in the form of the EHRC to complain to and who actually have…the ultimate responsibility to start enforcing this. We actually might see some change. We might see a shift in the landscape, Steven, that we so desperately need.

[Steven] Yeah, absolutely. Definitely. Let's change tack, shall we. We started off by talking about the games controller from Microsoft, the Xbox adaptive controller.

But now we are talking about composing music.

[Robin] Absolutely. So I spoke to Simon Tew of Digit Music. He was a Tech for Good award winner, or they were, back in the summer and he's going to be at TechSharePro showing a really amazing controller. So we've talked about game controller right at the beginning and we're getting our hands on some kit again at the end here.

It's an adaptive controller to help people with disabilities to post fantastic music. Let's talk about control one.

[New speaker, Simon Tew] So control one is an adaptive wheelchair controller and we have adapted it to be used as a musical instrument. So you're able to play a number of instruments with it or you're able to compose and produce using it, dependent on the setup that you have.

We're currently using it alongside a really popular piece of software called Ableton. We've developed a number of setups within Ableton that allow the controllers to bring out the best and be set up and differentiated for the different needs of all of the users.

But the main aim for this really- I’ve worked with young people with disabilities for a number of years. I'm on a project called the Able Orchestra, which aims to put them at the forefront of the compositional process and really kind of give them some creative control over of what they're creating and what they're playing.

And I just noticed a need for a new type of controller while working with them. One that captured all the muscle memory that they've built up from using a wheelchair controller. You know, I've all day every day to explore the world. And it just occurred to me, why are we not using all of this muscle memory and familiarity to allow them to explore music?

[Robin] That's such a brilliant idea and it's a no brainer. It's like all good ideas. They're pretty obvious, aren't they? Can we play some music? Yes, we can.

[Simon] This is a piece from Jess Fisher who was kind of one of the first people using control one device and this is her piece of music ‘Time stood still’.

[Robin] Really groovy tech man, groovy tech to help disabled people become pop stars. Full interview dropping in the feed later this week. We are all looking forward to TechShare Pro. It is going to be a great event. Mark Walker is back with us here on the Procast and Mark, I think it's a great opportunity for people to just get together and share experience and knowledge, isn't it?

[Mark] I think so. You know this event has grown so quickly over the last three years. We're tapping into an area of increased interest from so many different corners of the digital community. This is a place to get together and to find out who's interested, to talk to people who share your interest, but maybe come from a completely different background in terms of technical knowledge or interest.

And take something away that is not just about the knowledge and skills that you may gather, but also new people to connect with - I can see all sorts of opportunities for networking. We're creating social events to enable people to meet up and get to know one another just as much as sitting back and listening to inspiring speakers.

So I think that sense of community is what is really going to be exciting about it. And we're going to do everything we can to share the knowledge and the skills that we gather. This podcast is clearly a big part of that for us. This is new. We want to begin to be able to put it out and join the community conversation, with the sorts of interviews and resources we're going to pull together after the event…at the same about blogs and other content that we're going to publish. Because I really do think we're going to be getting some nuggets in there that we wouldn't get any other way. If we didn't get people in a room and get them talking to one another, then, you know, we wouldn't have the chance to learn so much from one another.

So that I think that really gives you a sense of what we're trying to achieve here. And for those that can't make it, bigger and better next year, hopefully, but equally keep your eye out on all the channels that we use to share information through because that's a real social purpose for us to share this and make sure you get hold of the knowledge and inspiring stories that we're gonna hear.

[Steven] Robin, it is going to be an amazing event. I am sure everyone can keep up to date here on the brand new TechShare Procast powered by AbilityNet. This is the place to get all of the very latest and what's going on at TechShare Pro. And you know, the podcast doesn't stop here, does it? There's lots more still to come even before the event.

[Robin] That's right. So we've mentioned earlier that the full versions of all of those interviews are going to drop in the feed. We're going to trickle them in over the next week, guys. And then of course there's the event itself on the 20th and 21st of November, after which we will be coming back to you with another full episode and followed by some full length interviews after that as well.

[Steven] So watch this space. Basically, you're not going to miss out. If you stay tuned to the Procast and aren't able to get to the event, you're not gonna miss anything. We'll bring it all to you. Okay, so what's next in the queue on the podcast then? What can people expect, Robin?

[Robin] Yes, so in a few days, guys, the full Jenny Lay-Flurrie, chief accessibility officer at Microsoft.

That interview will land in the feed - 35 odd minutes long, that is guys. So that's a real in depth, good interview. Check that one out, and then obviously we'll have Paul Smyth after that and they'll just keep coming. So yeah, check that out guys. And then obviously after the event and other show and some more full-length interviews, follow us with the hashtag #TechSharePro2019 as well.

[Steven] If you've got any comments or if you want to join the conversation. Please do. I'm Stephen Scott from RNIB. He is Robin Christopherson from AbilityNet. We are so looking forward to being back with you at TechSharePro 2019 and don't forget to subscribe and listen and keep listening to the all new TechShare Procast powered AbilityNet.

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