**Transcript - Accessibility Insights with Anita Mortaloni from Xbox December 2021**

ANNIE: Hello everyone.

Welcome to today's webinar.

Do feel free to drop into the Q&A box and say hi.

We have disabled the chat feature as we have discovered it can cause problems for some people using screen

readers.

So, I will give it a couple more moments for more people to join.

Okay.

We will make a start now.

So, welcome to the 18th session in our Accessibility Insights series, where AbilityNet's Head of Digital

Inclusion Robin Christopherson hosts a monthly online chat with individuals who are each working to improve

digital accessibility and digital inclusion.

This month he is chatting to Anita Mortaloni, who is Director of Accessibility for Xbox at Microsoft.

I'm Annie Mannion.

I'm digital marketing manager at AbilityNet.

I will be running you through today's session.

Just to go through a few bits of housekeeping.

We have live captions provided today by MyClearText.

You can turn on the captions using the Live Transcript button option.

Additional captions are available via streamtext.net/player?

event=AbilityNet.

Slides are available at SlideShare.

net/abilitynet.

And also on our website at abilitynet.org.

uk/Xbox-Webinars.

If you have any technical issues or you need to leave early, don't worry, you will receive an email in a couple

of days' time with the recording, the transcript and the slides.

Depending on how you joined the webinar, you should see a Q&A window.

If you would like to ask Anita or Robin any questions, drop them into the Q&A window and they will address

those after today's session in a follow-up blog on our website, again at abilitynet.org.

uk.

We have a feedback survey you will be directed to at the end.

If you are able to answer that and complete that at the end, that would be great.

So, that's all from me for now.

Over to Robin and Anita.

ROBIN: Fantastic, thank you, Annie.

Anita, welcome.

ANITA: Nice to be here.

ROBIN: Really glad to have you on, thank you so much.

I have to make a confession up front, I'm not a gamer!

Maybe that's because, I don't know, they haven't been hugely accessible to a blind person like myself before.

We will discuss about how things are changing quite rapidly as part of our conversation.

Let's start off with a very cheesy question we always ask our guests: Which beverage, hot or cold, have you

got to help you get through this ordeal?

ANITA: Hopefully it is not an ordeal and it is fun like gaming!

But I have coffee, because it is perfect for early mornings here in Seattle.

Usually, it's a lot rainier and gloomier, but today we have a little bit of sunshine, so coffee, nice and

warm!

ROBIN: Wow, that's great.

I am usually very big on coffee, but I'm trying to get rid of the coffee addiction.

It's the headaches thing.

I'm properly addicted basically.

So, this just hot water.

Yeah, I know!

Anyway, so hopefully I will get through this.

ANITA: Good luck!

ROBIN: Thanks.

So, let's start off with another question we always put to our guests which is, what in your opinion has

been the kind of major changes in the landscape of accessibility over the last ten years, because an awful lot

has happened?

ANITA: So, much has happened in the last ten years, which makes me very

excited for what's going to happen in the next ten years!

So, when I look back in the last ten years, we have seen a much greater awareness and understanding of what it

takes to make something accessible.

We have seen the framework of inclusive design take hold, the idea of solve for one and extend to many

really resulting in accessibility being built into more products, into the games, into the consoles, and not just

bolted on at the end.

It's part of the experience, the customisation and the options available for people to use.

And then a greater realisation that accessibility features have a wide

benefit, helping many people beyond the intended audience.

Seeing people use those features has been an incredible thing to watch over the last many years.

ROBIN: Absolutely, yeah.

Hand in hand with kind of a broader appreciation of accessibility, you know, in general but I'm so glad that

gaming has, you know, kept pace and in many ways, led the way.

So, yeah, let's talk about Xbox, then.

Xbox and gaming in general.

Where do you think its accessibility and the considerations are to do with inclusive gaming fits into broader

landscape?

ANITA: What a great question to start out with.

I kind of liken it to -- we hear a lot of times the idea of a journey and what's the journey of accessibility

that you've been on.

I love that metaphor because it is very much like gaming.

Of course, you want to beat the game at the end and get to the end and win and tackle it, but part of the play

that is involved in gaming is enjoying these smaller wins throughout the game, the people you meet and the

experiences that you have and tackling the challenges that come up.

And that's very similar to what we see across the industry as a whole.

Xbox continues to look for ways to expand our accessibility efforts,

because we know that journey, it's a journey, and there's way more to do but we're committed to making gaming

more inclusive and welcoming for all of our players.

So, maybe, if I can share a brief journey of what that looks like in Xbox.

If I rewind a bit, maybe to the mid-2000s, which seems like a lifetime ago, given everything over the last

couple of years, accessibility in gaming really started with a few passionate individuals that were

advocating for accessibility in Xbox.

They engaged with developers and designers and community members to start building that foundation.

About that time, the Connect came out and the team starting getting questions, like, "Can I play that with

a wheelchair, what if I'm missing an arm?

" It highlighted the impact and the need for accessible design for players with disabilities.

Fast forward to something you may have heard of, the Xbox Adaptive Controller.

It is a small little thing in the gaming world!

That was also initiative by a group of individuals with close ties to the community, addressing that gap of

players unable to use the standard controller due to motor disabilities.

And then the super bowl commercial came out, with the tagline when "

everyone plays we all win".

That was that moment where it highlighted when you put players at the start, at the centre of everything

that we do and bring in accessibility, like, innovation sparks at, like, a global scale.

So, that was followed by things like Copilot, being able to link two controllers together, accessibility

features in our titles, from audio pings, steering assist, console features, and I think we will get into

some more of the recent announcements later.

But it really shows that if we highlight gaming at the core of what we do is the community.

Throughout the whole journey, it's been about people, the players, creating that community, and those

individuals that identified a gap and felt confident and safe to pursue that and figure out how we remove those

barriers to play.

ROBIN: Absolutely.

And that Adaptive Controller proved popular in the broader gaming community as well, I think.

I've heard about people smashing their PBs because it is just that much more configurable, easy to use.

Have you heard that?

ANITA: Oh, absolutely.

This can be translated to accessibility in general, it's about options and giving people the way to

play or use software or hardware or whatever they're using, how they want to play or how they need to use it.

Everybody is different and everybody experiences in life differently, so providing those options has been

critical.

ROBIN: Absolutely, absolutely.

So, yeah, let's talk about accessibility in gaming and some of the big leaps that have happened in

recent months.

Would you agree there's been some pretty great and amazing developments?

ANITA: Oh, absolutely.

It is a really exciting time to be in gaming and accessibility, where the bar keeps getting raised higher and

higher because we get feedback from the community and the momentum is just building and it's fantastic!

So, let me share a couple of leaps, since you asked.

Of course, we will start with the game tight title Forza Horizon 5 came out.

It was great to be able to drive through and experience that with my kiddo, that can't quite drive yet.

One of the things, and I think this speaks to where we have come as an industry, the team partnered with the

disability community, and use the Xbox accessibility guidelines to implement those accessibility features, they put

the players at the centre of the project and it shows on the outcome of where the game ended up.

They have so many different options to customise how you play.

There is game speed modification, you can adjust how fast you go, because not everybody wants to race at 200 MP.

You have customisable subtitles, colour blindness mode and button remapping.

But the thing that, one of the things I love about it is the accessibility features, the options are available

right at the start.

You don't have to go searching and find them.

That should not be part of the game experience, they are just there, so you can explore it, customise your

experience, and it's right at the start.

But if we were to speak about discoverability and being able to find

those accessibility features, the next really big leap that we had in the last couple of months is the

accessibility feature tags.

This is another project that stemmed from the community itself.

Over the past many years, one of the questions that we've gotten a lot is what game can I play because it can be

incredibly frustrating to buy a game and find out minutes in that you can't play it, because it doesn't have one

of those critical features that you need.

We wanted to be able to answer those questions for folks and highlight the accessibility features within titles.

So, now titles, if they have accessibility features and the publisher has tagged them in the

store, they are now tagged with those accessibility features and so players can go and see what features they want

or need and then find games that have those features.

I love that because it makes it easier for players with disabilities to find the next game that they will

love, knowing it meets their needs from the beginning.

ROBIN: Absolutely.

Something as simple as, you know, can you just use a single stick input, or can you remap inputs in this game

because, you know, that user knows they will not get on unless they can do that.

Absolutely, I wish they would do that for the iOS app store, they would have accessibility tags.

I have spent quite a although of money only to find that I'm not able to use that particular app.

Yes, you can, the returns policy is there but it is not straightforward.

To know in advance, I think that's such a powerful thing.

I think that's unique to Xbox.

I think so.

So, yeah, amazing!

So, how do you kind of encourage the gaming industry and the videos

building these fantastic console titles to be aware of accessibility, to engage in accessibility?

How do you support them as Xbox, as Microsoft on that journey?

ANITA: What a great question.

A lot of the what do we do really comes from the community.

It's the people that are playing the games.

When you create a game, hardware or app, you want people to use it.

So being able to hear from the community and make sure that it is available and usable by as many people

as possible really is the goal.

But to do that, in addition to listening to the community, one of the things that we find is really, really

critical is being able to support those game creators and make it easy to understand what is game accessibility.

How do you include it, where do you include it?

Because just, like, taking all of that time to find a game that you can actually play, development time or

design time for game creation is limited.

People want to make the stuff, not research it.

On the accessibility tag "what game can I play", our accessibility guidelines stemmed from the Adaptive

Controller and it was from the developer community, how do I make my game more accessible, help me out.

That's when the accessibility team at Xbox came around and launched in 2019, after partnering with the community

and the developers and the industry to create the Xbox accessibility guidelines, a set of best practices

that outline what it means to have accessibility in your game.

It shows the why behind all of it.

Most recently, it is updated with examples and clarification.

On top of that, the team realised that a resource was needed to really explain what are the barriers to play

and what are the facilitators to remove those barriers, so the gaming experience guide was created to

outline that across all of the disabilities and also includes examples of situational circumstances

which we have found as a good entry point for people to realise "oh, I use that too".

There's a broader audience of individuals that use accessibility features and it really sparks the

implementation of that into the development cycle.

And then most recently, we created the gaming accessibility fundamentals

course.

It's a 100-level course of what is game accessibility, how do you collaborate with the community, what

are best practices around hardware, apps or titles into a short, free external course that can prove out

your game accessibility knowledge and it is really making those available outside of Xbox, to the industry.

We believe the more people that know about game accessibility and how to implement it, the more accessibility

features will get into the game.

It's just a win for the community.

ROBIN: Wow.

I mean, that's so brilliant it started with the users, you know, to inform that process.

Those are brilliant guidelines and those resources hopefully will see significant take-up across the

different studios and design houses.

Yeah, absolutely.

Let's look broader, at the broader digital community, do you think they

have something to learn from this accessible approach to gaming?

You know, is the broader lessons to learn here?

ANITA: Yes, and we learn a lot from the industry as well of course.

One of the things that has worked really well in gaming and you just touched on this a little bit as well,

is putting the player and the creator at the centre of what we do.

We focus on things that are core to who we are, just like as humans, play, connection.

The Xbox Adaptive Controller is super commercial and it captured the idea when everyone plays, we all win.

We know that play is a fundamental human need and we strive at Xbox to make it fun and available to the

billions of people around the world, including the 400 million gamers with disabilities.

By creating gaming experiences that everyone can enjoy and see themselves as a hero, we get to continue to

expand that community and bring in more perspectives.

We know that inclusion is about people and in the context of accessibility,

it's not for people, but it's really with players with disabilities, which is why the other thing is we recommend

is to actively seek out perspectives from the start.

Partner with the community, bring and co-develop and/or create feedback channels.

One of the examples we have of that is the Xbox accessibility insider lead Zale, for insiders, it has over 80,000

members who self-identify as having a disability or are an ally of the community.

It is a channel where our engineering teams can ask questions, get feedback early on accessibility features and

that feeds right back in to the development cycle.

So, yeah, I would say putting players at the centre, figure out the core of

what you do and then continue to learn alongside the industry.

Gaming is unique but so are a lot of other areas in the industry as well, and there's a lot of sharing that can

happen between all of us.

ROBIN: Wow!

So, let's talk about the future, then.

We have talked about how we got to where we are today.

I bet the future is really exciting.

So, what do you see as the future for gaming within your teams, within the industry more broadly, and, you know,

where does accessibility fit in.

Hopefully,, you know, in everything that you guys do and that the industry does going forward, because it just

seems so hot at the moment.

You know, let's not lose that momentum, are you excited?

ANITA: Yes, totally excited!

You took my answer!

Like, that's okay, but accessibility should absolutely be part of it and I don't think it should be -- my hope it

is not a fad thing.

Like, it continues to be here, it's hot now and it should be hot for a very, very long time because it needs

to be critical and included in everything that we do.

When I think about the future of gaming and where we're going, one of

the things that I love about gaming is it transport you into different worlds and experiences, that you might not

otherwise have encountered in the real world or to get to meet people you may never have encountered.

And for us to provide that experience and that opportunity to play and connect with as many different people

as possible, it's really only possible by including accessibility into the games, into the ecosystem and removing

those barriers to play.

So, as we think about what that means for the future of gaming, we know that how people play changes over a day, a

week, a month, a lifetime.

Like, we know that and, obviously, technology does as well.

Just look at how much has changed with the pandemic and the shift to remote work.

Incredible changes over the last couple of years.

So regardless of what happens with technology, accessibility, just like our players, as you mentioned in the

question, it really has to be front and centre so that we can include all of those perspectives, make sure that as

many people as possible can enjoy wherever we go with technology and then continue to engage and partner

with the community.

ROBIN: Wow, brilliant.

I'm excited!

You know, I think gaming might be open to me.

I've never ...

I used to like it when I could see back in the days of, you know, the Sega mega system things!

Yeah, maybe.

ANITA: I want to push you on that.

Like, I find it hard to believe that you are not a gamer at all.

Like, I don't know if you play candy crush on your phone, Scrabble, there has to be some game ...

ROBIN: Text Adventures ticks my boxes.

Let's make it more immersive, which more modern games are all about.

Yeah, I have that option.

ANITA: You are a gamer!

ROBIN: I have the option to look at the tags in the Xbox store and see

what may be possible for a completely blind person.

Yeah, fantastic!

Okay, a few minutes left, then.

The usual thing, I will put a question to you for a quick response and then also to ask you to pass on

something to next month's mystery guest.

So, Ted Drake of Intuit, a brilliant guy, he had this question for you, he is talking about

accessibility in gaming, fantastic, but to actually represent diversity within the games themselves is kind of a

level up still.

So, he was wondering Hell Blade, for example very sensitively deals with psychosis.

Are there any other initiatives or areas of development in your industry that you think are examples of good

practice when it comes to representing diversity within the games?

ANITA: First, pass on a thank you to Ted, a fantastic question!

I think how it's framed really highlights something, that Hell Blade sensitively dealt with psychosis, they

didn't just bring it n they based and they grounded it in the research and talking with people.

We have seen similar trends with psycho nauts2 and how they represent mental health with care and provide

accurate representation.

Or solitude exploring the issue of loneliness.

We are seeing this as a trend not just introducing disabilities or the concept of it, but doing it in a way

that offers true representation, grounded in research and talking with people and making sure it is authentic

and it's part of the whole storyline.

And then just the expansion of what accessibility features are and what falls under accessibility.

A great example of that is the video game Grounded.

It has spiders, really tiny and there are spiders everywhere that come out of the grass blades.

If you have arachnophobia, it may not be the funnest game for you to play!

But there is an accessibility feature for arachnophobia mode, where you can take off the legs of the spiders and

it makes the spiders a little bit less scary.

So, one of the trends we're seeing is just more options and really considering what are the barriers to

play and how do we remove that for players, even if it is just arachnophobia mode.

ROBIN: I had no idea.

That is really great.

That's really good.

A lot of thought has gone in.

I'm so glad you said it was based on research, really good research and not just what those people think it's like

to have those lived experiences.

So fantastic!

Okay, like I say, it is a mystery guest next month.

We haven't confirmed who it is quite yet.

So unfortunately, I'm going to have to ask you to give quite a general question to pass on to our next guest

around accessibility or gaming or whatever you like.

ANITA: Well, I should ask them what their favourite game is!

Let me dig more.

ROBIN: A bonus question.

We will do that.

ANITA: A perfect bonus question.

You have talked and asked a lot of questions around industry and the inclusive approach.

Ted had a question about bringing in experiences and abilities into gaming.

And we have talked a lot today about putting the players and creators at the centre of everything we do and

actively partnering with the community.

So, for the next guest speaker, whoever they may be, the question I would pose them is, how do you foster

a culture that welcomes and respects those diverse perspectives, where people feel safe to explore that,

bring them in and move the industry forward?

In the same vain, why is it so critical to have representation and hire people with disabilities as part

of the culture?

ROBIN: Nice.

Really good!

Fab questions.

They will be passed on.

Thank you so much indeed.

Really, really enjoyed it.

So, thank you for giving us your time.

I'm sure that there will be loads of questions that are going into the Q&A that will be covered off.

I'm sure Annie will tell us a little bit more about that.

Yeah, before I pass over to Annie, thank you again.

I really, really enjoyed our chat.

ANITA: Thank you as well.

This was fantastic and I look forward to answering all of the questions that come up!

ROBIN: Brilliant.

Thanks Anita.

We will pass back to Annie.

ANNIE: Yeah, thank you so much, Anita and Robin.

There are lots of questions that we hope to answer online in the next few days.

So, everyone will receive an email with a link to access them.

So just a little bit more information that might be of interest to people.

So, we also run online training sessions on digital accessibility and you can find out more at abilitynet.org.

uk/training.

We have a special code to use on our training courses for webinar attendees, and that's

AbilityNetWebinar10, to save 10% on our courses.

The next ones are in January now.

The first one is Introduction to digital accessibility, that's a free course.

On the 20th January, accessibility for copy writers.

On the 26th January, how to deliver and sustain accessible digital learning.

On the 27th January, how to begin your own accessibility testing.

And then you can also sign up to our newsletter for the latest

announcements about digital accessibility.

You can visit our YouTube channel and download our podcast.

We also have a suite of accessibility services for you to investigate and then also just finally, don't forget

about our next webinars, which you can access at abilitynet.org.

abilitynet.org.

uk/webinars.

On 14th December, we have a free session called How to recognise and promote a neurodiverse workforce.

We have speakers from Evenbreak, Lexxic, and the UK Government.

So, thanks again, Anita and Robin, and everyone who has joined us.

Please do complete the feedback form you will be directed to at the end.

We will be in touch with you soon.

Bye everybody.