# Disability Inclusion Insights with Boots UK – Podcast transcript

Lizi
So welcome everybody to another episode of Disability Inclusion Insights. My name is Lizi Green. I am the Digital Inclusion Consultant at AbilityNet. I am joined once again by my colleague Adam Tweed, and we are absolutely delighted today to be joined by Rosa Salamone. Rosa is the process manager for SAP Procurement at Boots UK. So welcome, Rosa. Thank you so much for joining us today.

And so we always kick off our podcast, Rosa, by asking our guest what hot or cold beverage you have chosen for the podcast today, which is normally followed by myself and Adam telling you that we're drinking exactly the same thing that we drink every podcast. So what have you, what have you chosen today?

Rosa

Well, I have chosen a Chai tea and I started to become really fond of it. Since my trip to India and a very good friend of mine, who is Indian, she's been trying to, you know, involve me in drinking Chai tea and I would say no, no, no. And then we went to this trip together and then now I cannot have a morning without my Chai tea.

Lizi

Amazing. Sounds great. I've always been meaning to try Chai tea, but I'm, you know, English through and through and I can't seem to get off my just, you know, standard English black tea, preferably from Yorkshire.

Rosa
Well, that sounds good.

Lizi

Yes. And Adam?

Adam
yeah, I'm on the coffee. I'm grinding my own beans and its Japanese coffee. I'm expanding my kind of palette. So yeah. But the best I've found so far is Japanese Yushima, it's called.

Lizi

Very nice that that would be what I ask you on the podcast from now on with the coffee from because there is always gonna be coffee. OK. So Rosa, could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself, your job role, a bit about what you do at Boots UK and what Boots they're doing?

Rosa
Yeah, sure. So first of all, hi to everybody. I'm very honoured to be in the podcast because I didn't get the chance to say that earlier. I was too excited about my charity and so, as Lizi already introduced me, I'm Rosa Salamone, I am a white woman of an average built. I have brown short curly hair and I wear glasses and today I'm wearing a purple top. I am originally from Italy, as you may have guessed from Accent, but have spent pretty much 50% of my life living here in the UK. Also, you may not think so from Accent again and I have a bachelor degree in business and Spanish and from my life have volunteered for charities in school to support children with additional needs. Specifically one of my last role as Co-opted school governor, I was responsible and I was the main link with the SENCO or anything to do with the SENCO provision I was also supporting with. I am currently working at Boots UK as a process manager as already mentioned by Lizi and I also used to be the chair of the disability business resource group here within Boots which start after three months. I started stepping in and pretty much had started from the scratch with this, with this wonderful group which has been absolutely amazing here, Boots. And then for those who don't know Boots. Boots is the aftercare and retail company that offer wide range of services such as vaccination and also products including over the counter medication, prescriptions, medication and half in beauty products, skin care, cosmemetics, toiletry and more literally we sell everything.

And we have an extensive retail presence across the UK as well online and online, online store and also internationally.

Lizi
Fantastic. Thank you. So I'd like to ask you why you think it's important to employ disabled people and ask you if there's anything that Boots is involved with around disability inclusion that you can tell us about?

Rosa
Oh. So why is it important? That is quite a big question actually. Where to start from? Well be because you're not employing disabled people, promote inclusion, diversity, provide equal opportunities and non discrimination.

Because disabled people represent a diverse talent pool and often they're quite innovative.

Because they are resilient, they have some kind of warriors, that's why I kind of find them. And because they represent our community and customers, because they enrich our knowledge and value. I mean literally the list is endless and here everything of the same talking from personal experience where I have close family members who also have disability. So, when I say these things, I mean not only from a work point of view, but also I have seen this first hand and in terms of what Boots does. So we are involved with kind of different initiatives. So number one, we are a disabled confident employer.

Boots has been, I think this is now the second year, where its the health and beauty partner for Purple Tuesday and one of our to show their commitment to avoiding the involvement. One of our director which is also the sponsor of the Disability Business Resource Group has also been appointed as a retail ambassador for disability access by the minister, the Minister for Disability people which is Chloe Smith MP. And we also have engaged with different partnership, one of which with the royal pharmaceutical society with the whom we have worked on a different event and different things. And there was one specifically where we meet up with the Scottish MP Parliament, with Scottish Parliament, with one of the MP's with Boots represented what can an employer actually do to support people with disability, how to retain, how to recruit and so on. So just few of the things we involved with.

Lizi

Oh, yeah not much going on at Boots!

Adam
I think it was it was really interesting what you were saying there about UM why it's important and having a diverse staff because it represents your customer base as well. And I mean we do lots of these and we hear from people from different industries. And I think for somebody in retail it's really kind of within that retail industry, it's really, really crucial that your staff represents your customers as well that you don't fall into those traps where you are assuming that everything you do is based on your assumptions about your audience. You've actually got people who are employed with you who can point out, you know, hang on a second, this is not inclusive, this doesn't work for me, that sort of thing. So I just wanted to highlight, I think it's really interesting to have somebody say that you know we have a staff that represents our customer base as well.

Rosa
Yeah. And then we have done lots around that as well Adam which and hopefully I can tell you a little bit more as we carry on with this with podcast because the business resource group has been just the phenomenon and the community who represent that group is made by people who have disabilities, or people like myself When I got you know a family member they got this ability. So there we go again that first hand experience. So yes, it's, it's truly, it's truly a nice, absolutely nice things to have within our company.

Adam
Yeah, absolutely.

Lizi
Absolutely. So, so yes, sounds like there's lots and things going on at Boots and lots of things that are involved with that. And how important a role is disability inclusion played in the growth of the Boots that we know today, do you think?

Rosa
OK, so I as I was mentioned just earlier and with the bits already with Adam said as well, the contribution has been quite enormous internally as well as externally. So we have lots initiative but I will mention only few here as I'm conscious of the time I can talk forever. So internally as I mentioned via the use of the PSG and educational events, we've seen an increased awareness and a bigger ask from colleagues all across the business to say hey I need some help, I got colleague got disability, how I can support that colleague and people start to be more aware of non-visible disability. And I think one of the elements which we have found has been quite big is around neurodiversity as well. Although we can debate about is this a disability is not for you know we've been encapsulated that altogether and that has been quite big drive internally.

If I look externally, I mean one of the big things is the and the introduction of Recite me accessibility toolbar on our website which include things such as text to speech, translation, font size and other like feature enabled. Another feature enabling customers to really create a truly customizable inclusive shopping experience. And I said this is quite a big one because it is specifically important as Boots was the first retail in the UK to introduce such accessibility toolbar. And then the next one is the Alzheimer's Society dementia friend programme supporting customer with non-visible disability. That again we you know Boots as kind stuff start to do. And then the one I think the last one I want to kind share with you is one that proved the food is a great example of integrated disability inclusion in action where members of the business resource group who have a disability contributed in shaping a more accessible store layout as part of our beauty reinvention programme that looked at revamping our beauty hall. So we have launched, I think we the first wave was around 60 stores but obviously the programme is ongoing and it was amazing. We have just had the MOD store here in in the head office and we went in exactly and we discussed about all that is too high. People came in they you know with the wheelchair, scooter and they tried to move navigate around and it was truly amazing experience and you know even the writing well, how far you can see the colour.

So, yeah, for me, I think that probably was one of my highlights in terms of the disability inclusion that played in the growth of Boots as you guys see today, you know, fully,

Lizi
Absolutely, again loads going on at Boots, definitely.

Adam
Yeah. I think the again to go back to something you said around neurodiversity, neurodivergence and the fact that there are people who choose not to see it as a disability, who don't identify themselves as having a disability because they're neurodivergent. And I think from our perspective and the work that we do, it's really important to be creating inclusive environments because they don't need people to identify as disabled in order to benefit from the sorts of kind of considerations that you put in place. And it should be that we are creating these environments that flex according to people's need that don't require anybody to kind of share or disclose or ask for additional things. So, yeah, it's really nice to kind of hear that.

Rosa
Absolutely.

Lizi

Yeah. And you mentioning awareness as well was also a key thing. And you know that your colleagues now have an awareness of things that other colleagues need or that that that your customers might need. Because yeah, awareness is a huge, huge part of it, definitely so.

Fantastic. So you've got so much going on Rosa and you're doing so many things at Boots. And have you faced any barriers when you've been planning or implementing any of these changes and improvements? And if so, what have those barriers been and how do you think your organisations and the people that Boots have started to try and overcome those things?

Rosa
OK, I think I think one, I would say one probably on the ongoing barrier has been to reach out to all our store colleagues spread across our UK state. We have over 2000 stores and as you can imagine some of them, they are in the remote part of the countries

So reaching out to those people have been quite challenging because again you know the amount of employee you have. So when you put something in place it could be quite tricky to make sure everybody actually knows and see. But the business being great has been supporting with using any comms channels available to us and we have a lot of them by they've been supported by sharing the message and initiative in different communication formats. So we got some writing, we got video, we go quick like different things that we put together and like on different sites and channels and we've been using policy to refer to the different initiative again that they are available for colleagues. So, I think probably that is the main, the main real thing and to be honest apart from that have not really faced any other barrier. I think what I've come across are people actually want to make a difference, but what have realised that is that some of the things we stumble across, and not due to lack of willingness but lack of knowledge and Boots are sure to be really committed in spreading that knowledge and become a truly inclusive employer.

Lizi
Absolutely, yeah, fantastic. I think I think you're right then. I think no one ever intentionally sets out to do anything but it is just that lack of knowledge and understanding. So knowing that yeah, Boots are really committed to that, that knowledge is fantastic and teaching, you know, your staff and your employees, more. It's just going to help improve that knowledge and help the knowledge of everybody because it's really important that everybody is involved across the organisation, and it's certainly sounds that Boots have got that in mind and you know they're very aware that they want all of their staff to, to have that knowledge. So that sounds fantastic.

Rosa

Indeed Lizi. And also, we don't always get right that at times where we give wrong, but it's OK. I mean, Boots has always been there. Anytime they got wrong, they've been right behind it to try to make it right and for me sometimes it will.

This can be criticised, criticised to say, oh you've done it wrong, but for me the fact that they're happy to correct where they go wrong speaks quite loudly.

Adam
Yeah. And I think there is always that risk that people worry so much about getting something wrong that they do nothing at all. So it's really nice to that you're highlighting that as well.

Lizi
Brilliant. So we've talked lots already. Actually, I think we've covered most of these. But just if there's anything else that you want to touch on, are there any specific initiatives that you do have in place at Boots to facilitate that inclusive, accessible working environment for all of the employees you've talked about lots of stuff that you've got going on. So, we've definitely touched on it. But if there was anything specific that you wanted to highlight.

Rosa
There is more Lizi, it’s never enough. Yeah. Yes, if you are the things, I guess we got a, we have, we have literally so many initiatives, but just to name a few, workplace adjustment process. I mean that is one of the keys to retaining staff to make sure that the best of themselves. And we have launched the Colleague Passport again that was new to boards, and we've done that last year and it's been quite successful. I mentioned about the disability business resource group which is kind of like the driver among some of this initiative. We have changed, we have easy access car park, we have an accessible building in the head office. Again, the head office we have quiet room with a colleague, found the environment too stressful and want somewhere to go for a bit. They go to that place. We have a sunflower lanyard scheme across all store as well in our head office and we have changed all our training internal and we have done them more in a more inclusive way.

So yeah, somebody initiative but we've got many more just running alongside and as I said the this, this disability business resource group is being the main driver of that.

Adam
Can I ask about the passport scheme that you talked about there? Cause I don't know that everybody listening to this is going to be aware of exactly what you mean by the passport or the disability passport.

Rosa

Sure. So, the disability passport is actually a document if you want to call it document owned by the employer and it helps to facilitate the initial conversation with their line manager regarding a disability long medical condition, their carer responsibilities. And we said this could be used by anybody. If somebody feels pregnant that they need a little bit of adjustment or a little bit of change within their work environment and that document that is belongs to the employee, they can share with whoever they want to. If they change the line manager or if they change role, they don't have to explain everything all over again. They can just take that document and just say these are the things have been put in place for me and the beauty of it is that it can illustrate what do I look like on a good day and what do I look like on a bad day. Again, it's not prescriptive. It doesn't you don't have to follow everything. It's a template to put together just to help facilitating that conversation because on the we did an internal survey borderline lots of the line manager did say is like I don't know where to start. I don't know if I said the wrong the wrong thing. So we give that tool that can be used, can be initiated by anybody and then with that if anything extra is needed. This is when they're gonna move into the workplace adjustment where maybe a colleague need to order something specifically to basically and for they to run the day-to-day job task and activities so that that's what they call it passport is and they can share with other colleagues, with other members, with anybody that knows them that they want.

They want them to know and what they look like. So it's pretty much it's open to them how they want to use it price there if they need to.

Adam
So yeah it's a nice idea that that idea that you know you've got somewhere to start as a line manager but also as a disabled employee or somebody experiencing barriers. You're not having to constantly re explain to people again and again and again and advocate for yourself that you just have to do this once and then you're given something that says look we've done all that can we just move on to how I work best so that yeah nice idea. But obviously moving, moving more and more towards inclusive environments kind of reducing that need we hope.

Rosa
Indeed.

Lizi
Absolutely so with so much going on at Boots, Rosa and all the things that you've got going on, are there any areas that you still think you want to make improvements on for further inclusion for all of your employees?

Rosa
And I think we definitely, I know we've done a lot, but we definitely have a lot more to do. But I think we end the right track. The commitment is, is in there and I think for the past few years the focus has been more inward looking in at raising awareness and making improvements where we possible with you know where the gaps were, what can think can be changed. And I think very recently we've started to look more upwards I think such attraction and recruitment and how to best serve our customers. So, I think that is where you know the next step are. So, we've done quite a lot internally. I think it's quite embedded now within the company and now we can start to move a little bit away from that and look what else now externally, what can we do?

Lizi
No, absolutely.

It's definitely a journey and we always say that we everyone is on a journey and we're all at a different stage in that. But you're definitely heading in in the right direction and you've got you've done so many things already, but you know there is always things that we can continue to do even AbilityNet, as an organisation you know we're aware there's we're on our own journey too and there's always stuff that we can carry on doing. So you know you're never, quite never an end, It's never ending because it's constantly changing as well, especially in the digital world that we are so firmly in now and yourselves too with Boots, you know you have a huge online presence too, as you mentioned. So that digital accessibility is forever changing with the digital world. So we're never going to be fully there, but we're definitely all on the right road, we're trying, we're trying hard progress over perfection.

Rosa

We’re trying, we’re trying really hard.

Adam

Progress over perfection, right?

Rosa

Exactly

Lizi
Brilliant. So my last question, is what we've had some interesting answers to this already, I’m interested to see if anyone tries and go off the cuff, but everybody's planned it which is fantastic. But my last question, that we ask is using no more than 10 words. Can you summarise one piece of advice or tip on what you've learnt since creating a disability inclusive workplace? So, so far from our guests we've had one who was absolutely bang on ten words and we've had one do it in four. So we'll see. See what you can come up with Rosa.

Rosa
Well, there is one then. I I don't know. I keep repeating all the time because I quite, I quite love this one. It’s: Accessibility benefits broader audiences than intended. Inclusivity fosters positive change. And I think I've done in ten words.

Lizi

Amazing. Yeah, absolutely. They're fantastic. These phrases everybody's doing are so great, we're gonna have to start pretending that they're ours.

Start stealing them for our own taglines. But no, that's fantastic. Yeah, definitely sums it up very, very well. So,, that's great. So that's the end of all of our questions. So I would just like to say thank you so much for joining us today, Rosa. And it's been a fantastic insight to all of the things that you've got going on at Boots, which is huge, which is lovely to hear about and really, really nice to hear about everything that you've got going on. And Adam, have you got any final thoughts?

Adam

No final thoughts from me other than just a huge thank you for joining us and sharing your journey, your experiences and your knowledge with us.

Rosa
Well thank you to you guys. As I said it was an honour to be with you. I truly had fun doing this podcast with you and enjoyed it and I think I just want to close with one more things. If whoever is listening to us and anyone who's got this disability who may struggle and in may think that actually the life has been very challenging, employers not you know they're not there so on, please have faith because there are other people like myself that they're working the background to support the inclusivity and the community. You're not alone, although sometimes probably feels that way. But please, please, please believe that there are people that working there for you guys.

Lizi
Absolutely.

Adam

Absolutely. Yeah

Lizi
Fantastic. Well, thank you so much, Rosa. I'm gonna go and try a Chai tea. Now you've convinced me with your intro that I need to try some Chai tea. But thank you so much for joining us today.

Rosa
You're very welcome.