

Philip D.: Hello, Patreon supporters, and welcome to the Patreon exclusive interview of the Access Champion podcast. Thank you so much for supporting the podcast. I can't say that enough. Every dollar helps us move forward, helps us reach more people, helps us be the most accessible and inclusive podcast in the universe.

Philip D.: This week, we're joined in our exclusive content section here on Patreon by Elizabeth Ralston, who is a consultant and the founder of the Seattle-King County Cultural Accessibility Consortium. Just so jazzed to have her join us. She sat down with us at our popup studio in Denver at the Kennedy Center LEAD Conference. We met at the opening ceremony and just hit it off. And I think she's doing really interesting things.

Philip D.: Obviously, Seattle is near and dear to my heart. I don't want to say obviously, I don't know if I've shared that on the podcast. Half of my family lives out in Seattle. I'm a Seattle Mariners fan and previously a Seattle Supersonics fan, RIP. And just love that city and so appreciative of the work that Elizabeth is doing out there, creating community, creating change. And I am so excited to share that with you. So, without further ado, Access Champion, Elizabeth Ralston.

Philip D.: All right. We are here at our LEAD popup studio here in Denver, Colorado. I'm really, really excited to be sitting down with someone I met just last night at the opening night ceremony at the Denver Art Museum, Elizabeth Ralston, who is a consultant and the founder of the Seattle-King County Cultural Accessibility Consortium. Thanks for taking the time to chat.

Elizabeth R.: Thank you.

Philip D.: So what I love ... Every now and then someone will reach out and say, "I got some stuff on my mind, and I want to share it." And I'm so excited that you are just like that. We chatted a bit last night, but I'd love to hear from you ... We were just off air recounting a little bit about your journey. I'd love to hear a little bit about your journey.

Elizabeth R.: Definitely. I'm really excited to be here at this conference. It's really opened up a lot of possibilities for me. I started on this journey by thinking about my participation in the arts.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elizabeth R.: And I'm a season subscriber to a theater in Seattle. And once during the run of the show I go to a captioned performance. And because it only occurs once, that's the only day I can go. And I started thinking, Well, that's not really fair, because I'm a busy person. I have a busy life. I have a family. I have work.

Elizabeth R.: So I started thinking about equity and how it impacts health. Because I have a public health background so I'm speaking from that perspective, as a public

health professional working in the nonprofit space, focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. And so I kind of woke up one day and thought, Wow, I'd like to do more to help people understand why it's not really equitable to have one performance per run of the show.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative), absolutely. And after you wake up and realize that, what were the next steps you took?

Elizabeth R.: That's a good question. So I had some connections within the arts community. And I started talking to people about this issue and trying to figure out how receptive people were. And people were really receptive. They wanted to do something about access. They wanted to have people of all disabilities. Because, you know, someone said at the opening ceremony of the Lead Conference that art is part of being human, right?

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elizabeth R.: And if you are actively engaged in the arts, you will be healthy and happy and thriving, if you feel like you are part of society. And arts is a big part of our society.

Elizabeth R.: So I started talking to people. And a friend of mine said, "You should start a consortium in Seattle that focuses on this." And I started looking at other models around the US.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elizabeth R.: And Chicago was one of them.

Philip D.: Yep, the CCAC is great. I love everything that they do. And I know they came out of MAC in New York-

Elizabeth R.: Yup.

Philip D.: Which is really great. So what were the steps you took to create this consortium in Seattle?

Elizabeth R.: So I started back in September. I talked with one of the main funders in Seattle called [inaudible 00:05:51]. I had a connection there, and we sat down for coffee. And I said, "This is what I'm interested in doing." And he said, "That's great. We already have something that that, but we're focusing on cognitive disabilities." And I said, "Oh, that's great."

Elizabeth R.: Oh, by the way, I should preface by saying that I'm deaf. I would think I've said that earlier, which is another reason why I started down this path, because I

have a hearing loss, and my family, my husband and my two kids all have hearing loss. So that's another instigation for doing this.

Elizabeth R.: And I said, "That's great, but what about all disabilities? Can we focus on that?" And he said, "Well, come talk to us, and we'll see what we can do."

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elizabeth R.: So I started talking to them and building a relationship. And they said, "We're going to give you some money so you can do some workshops and start training people in the community and educating them about what that means. What does accessibility really mean?" So we have done two workshops so far.

Philip D.: Wow, in less than a year.

Elizabeth R.: Yeah, it's pretty cool. And there was a huge demand for it. We had about 80 people complete workshop, and we made them free so that people could access the workshops.

Elizabeth R.: And the first one was a panel of people with disabilities talking about their experiences accessing the arts. One was a blind person. One was a capital-D Deaf person, meaning that their first language was ASL. The third person was a person with autism. And the fourth was a person with MS, so she had a physical disability. And they all talked about the barriers and what was working well, what wasn't working well.

Elizabeth R.: And I'm part of really that conversation and got questioned from the audience. And they texted their question to me, which was really cool because it allowed me to keep the conversation moving along.

Philip D.: That's awesome. It's both accessible and also efficient.

Elizabeth R.: Yes, yes, for sure.

Philip D.: I love efficiency if nothing else.

Elizabeth R.: For sure.

Philip D.: So I'm going to steer in a different direction here because you were talking about the lack of open caption performances.

Elizabeth R.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: So there is an inequity if there is only one performance per run. Where do you land on automated and personal captioning, so where like a device-

Elizabeth R.: You mean like GalaPro or something-

Philip D.: GalaPro or CaptionPoint or ... There's a few others that are individualized.

Elizabeth R.: Yes. I've heard mixed things about GalaPro because of the problems with connectivity. And having to hold the handheld device for the two hours is problematic. I haven't actually had a chance to try it-

Philip D.: Okay.

Elizabeth R.: I've been out of town every time there's been an experiment. But I will say that there are theaters that have tablets that you can get for any performance.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elizabeth R.: They're attached to your seat, the armrest, where they actually stand alone. I mean, not standalone ... What do you call them? You can stand ... They operate on a stand.

Philip D.: Yeah, they have a little tripod type situation.

Elizabeth R.: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And you can bring them to any performance. That's the ideal situation.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Elizabeth R.: Where you can just show up and they have a device for you.

Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I agree. I think that's, yeah, that seems like the most convenient. And I think a lot of places are starting to move that direction-

Elizabeth R.: Yes.

Philip D.: I know some of the regional theaters that use GalaPro have created holders for it, holders for the devices. Broadway houses operate under some different union rules and things like that.

Elizabeth R.: Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

Philip D.: But I know some of the nonprofit ones because they're set up to serve their audience.

Elizabeth R.: Yes, for sure.

- Philip D.: So that's fantastic. I like to let people dream their dreams, and I want to hit you with two different sets of dreams.
- Elizabeth R.: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Have fun.
- Philip D.: First, for this consortium, what is your hope for the future of it?
- Elizabeth R.: Yeah, this is one of the reasons I came to the conference, just to kind of mull over what's next.
- Philip D.: Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Elizabeth R.: And I'm getting ideas about what's next. And I think the bottom line is I have a great steering committee. Everybody's very passionate and committed, but they all have full-time job. So realistically it's hard to keep it going unless you have someone who's, I guess, taking shots and moving along. And if that's going to be me then I need to figure out the best way to do that and where I get funding from.
- Elizabeth R.: And the main goals that we have are more training workshops and helping professionals connect with one another. That's the first goal. The second is to have a calendar, an access calendar that will show what shows are being produced that are accessible, maybe on a website, for example. And the third one is possibly to create an equipment share program so that small black box theaters or a small museum who can't afford to have equipment, purchase equipment, can borrow from this program.
- Elizabeth R.: I'm also very interested in audio description. We only have a couple of audio describers in Seattle. And they are aging out and there's nobody to replace them. So I'm really interested in trying to create a training program for new audio describers, to have more accessibility for people with low vision or who are blind.
- Elizabeth R.: And all of this is going to take funding. And so writing grants and doing a lot of connecting with donors who might have a personal investment in this work. And also Seattle is a very wealthy city. We have Microsoft. We have Amazon. So tapping into some of the corporations I think will really keep this effort going.
- Philip D.: That's fantastic. I support that dream. As someone who loves the city of Seattle and is a longtime Mariners fan, and actually my Mariners hat is upstairs in my hotel room-
- Elizabeth R.: Oh my goodness. I don't know if they're doing too well.
- Philip D.: No, it's rebuilding. It's rebuilding.

Elizabeth R.: [crosstalk 00:13:03]. Like the Seahawks.

Philip D.: Yeah, there you go. Well, thank you so much. Thank you sincerely because I do love that city so much, and so much of my family lives out there. And knowing that there are passionate people about access and inclusion out there that are willing to dig in and do the work is heartening and exciting. So thank you for all of that, and thank you for being an Access Champion.

Elizabeth R.: Thank you for having me on this. I really appreciate it.

Philip D.: Thanks again to Elizabeth for taking the time to hop on into our popup studio and chat. And frankly, thanks for grabbing me at the opening night ceremony and starting the conversation and chatting. It just was so exciting to learn what you're doing and what you've continued to do out in the Pacific Northwest. So thank you for all of that.

Philip D.: Thank you, our Patreon supporters, for supporting the podcast. Again, this podcast doesn't happen without supporters like you. This is a labor of love, but there is labor involved and there is expense involved, and we need as many of you as possible. If you know other listeners that aren't supporters but maybe do have a dollar a month to send our way, please feel free to share how excited you are or how much you've enjoyed this content, hopefully you have enjoyed this content, and that's that.

Philip D.: So thank you as always to our executive producer, Matt Kerstetter. Thank you to our associate producer, Miss Kelsey Rose Brown. And thank you to our champion intern, Savannah Cooper. We'll be back again next week. And remember, inclusion believers and Patreon supporters, never stop running through that brick wall.