



# Transcript

## Episode 41: Making Tourism Accessible

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### Dean Askin 00:02

This is you can't spell inclusion without a D, the podcast that explores the power of inclusion in business, in employment, in education and in our communities, and why disability is an important part of the diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. Conversation with your hosts, Amy widows and Dean Askin.

### Dean Askin 00:28

Hello there. Welcome to the show and season seven of you can't spell inclusion without a D, this is episode 41 we've got some compelling conversations lined up this year, some of the shows in our 2026 lineup this season, we'll be exploring the intersection of disability and rural and remote communities, disability awareness and attitudes in the multi generational workplace, how the use of AI in recruiting is affecting job seekers who have a disability. And to close out the season, we'll be looking at the overall state of disability inclusion in business in Canada in 2026 it's been three years since we talked about that in episode 14. So we thought, with rapid changes happening, it's time to have another look at the state of things to close out our season. Hope you'll tune in for all these conversations over the course of our 2026 season. Hi there. I'm Dean Askin, back here with you for another season of the show, and my co host is here kicking off her second season at the other mic. Hi there. Amy. Hi Dean. Great to be back for my second season co hosting this podcast, and especially for this episode, as we kick things off on a touristy note with a conversation about making tourism in this country more accessible. Tourism is one of the most important sectors of our economy. It directly employs more than 700,000 people. It's almost 2% of Canada's gross domestic product. And the number of people, people internationally, making Canada a tourism destination keeps rising. That's for sure. In December 2025 there were almost 510,000

### Dean Askin 02:05

international arrivals. That was up 14% from the same month in 2024

### Dean Askin 02:10

and in the summer, 2025 tourism season, that's from May through August, there was record revenue for tourism businesses in all \$58.96

**Dean Askin** 02:22

billion billion dollars. And Destination Canada projects annual revenue in the tourism sector will hit \$160

**Dean Askin** 02:30

billion by 2029 that's just three years from now.

**Amy Widdows** 02:35

People from all over the world are coming to visit Canada, and that includes people who have a disability, which begs the question, how accessible is tourism in this country? What are the best practices in making tourism and tourist attractions and businesses accessible, and what are businesses and attractions in the tourism sector missing out on if they're not accessible to tourists who have a disability and job seekers who have a disability, that's for sure. So that's what we're exploring in Episode 41 with our three guests. And we're really getting a nationwide perspective on all this. Joining us from Canada's capital, Ottawa, Ontario. Jasmine Z she's the Workforce Development Director at tourism HR Canada. Shelly Petit joins us from Fredericton, New Brunswick in the Maritimes. She's the chair of the New Brunswick coalition of persons with disabilities,

**Amy Widdows** 03:28

and way out on the other coast in Western Canada. Jamie Miller Dixon joins us from Vancouver, British Columbia. Jamie is the principal consultant at McLeod silver, HR business partners, McLeod silver is the lead consulting organization for newly launched tourism workforce accessibility clinic. It's a national initiative to support Canada's tourism sector by helping businesses reach new tourism workforce talent, be more inclusive and enrich tourism in Canada for both employees in the sector and visitors exploring our country. Jamie and Shelly, welcome to the show, Jasmine. Welcome back to you can't spell inclusion without a D. Jasmine was on the last season for episode 33 when we explored the belong initiative in the tourism sector, and we talked a bit about that in this episode. Thank you for all coming on the show and sharing your perspectives.

**Amy Widdows** 04:22

So I'll kick it off with the first question. And Jasmine. Jamie Shelly, how would you describe the state of accessibility and disability inclusion in Canada's tourism sector from both an inside inclusive hiring perspective and the outside customer perception, including from the disability community. Jasmine, if you'd like to start.

**Jasmine Qi** 04:44

Okay, thank you. Thank you for Amy and Dean, this wonderful opportunity to welcome me back. Hello everyone. I'm Jasmine chi. I'm the Director of Workforce inclusion at tourism nature Canada, so as someone leading the.

**Jasmine Qi** 05:00

Long initiative, I do see real momentum, but also still gaps existing in the sector, inside organizations, there's definitely growing interest in inclusive hiring and accommodations, also with deeper understanding of disability inclusion in the sector from business perspective, yet many hiring systems, such as job designs or HR practices, still make access a little bit difficult. From a customer perspective, experiences are uneven. Some businesses are doing excellent, thoughtful work, while parts of the travel chain, notably some transportation hubs, still present major barriers. That patchwork means people with access needs still face a fraction both as guests and as potential employees. And that's exactly why practical industry support and sector level standards really matters, and that's that's why the belong project still existing to provide the support to this sector. Thank you for that. Jasmine. Jamie Shelly, do you want to add to that? I'll add to that. Thanks very much.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 06:17**

Yeah. Further to what Jasmine mentioned, I would describe it as a work in progress,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 06:24**

while we are seeing, especially through our initiative, the tourism workplace accessibility clinic, we are seeing some significant interest from employers in terms of, how do we, you know, what are some of the barriers that we have in place within Our organizations, within our hiring processes, and how can we adjust those barriers so we are more inclusive as a business, as an organization and as a sector?

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 06:50**

One really great example is from from last year, last fall, the pursuit collection in Alberta. So this is, you know, this is the group that runs a lot of hotels. And Banff used to be the old Brewster tours, so right through the ice fields and up to

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 07:07**

up to Jasper. So they wanted to look at

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 07:10**

an accessibility audit for their businesses and all of their venues. So the boat tours, the ice field tours the, you know, the sky trams and and hotels and restaurants. So that,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 07:23**

you know, that tells me that, you know, there's an organization that cares enough to make that guest experience accessible for world class travel. There are world class destinations. So lots of travelers traveling together as families, lots of people with disabilities tend to travel with others, as opposed to independently. So, you know, that was a really great example of the kinds of things that some of the tourism employers are interested in doing. I know that region in Alberta is very, very engaged in inclusive hiring.

**Shelley Petit 07:53**

Absolutely, my daughter just took advantage of some opportunities out there. And we're from New Brunswick, but here in New Brunswick, the story's not quite as rosy. We recently had a big release from the tourism department, and they kind of forgot about us again. So all kinds of images and portrayals

and not one person with a disability. When you speak to the people in charge, they all have people with disabilities in their immediate family, so they should be more aware. We also see things where a building or a venue may have something set up for people that need wheelchair access, but then they've forgotten about every other disability going so it's like, oh well, we covered one. We're good. And our biggest problem in New Brunswick is the lack of accessible transit. So it's like, I can see you, but I can't get there from here, as we like to say. So it's becoming, you know, but it's on the radar, and we keep pushing it on the radar, because right now, this is the biggest economic

**Shelley Petit 08:56**

advantage that Canada can have with everything that the state has cut out. I keep saying, keep looking, look for the equipment that they're not using, that they're hiding away in barns. Pick it up for pennies on the dollar. They don't want it with. There's just so much opportunity. And every time we make a venue a little more accessible, then it becomes a place where we can work. And then we ensure it's even more accessible, and it just

**Shelley Petit 09:23**

it changes the economy and it changes the world, and it changes Mental Health Perspectives for people with disabilities and seniors in our environment, and it could be one of the easiest and best ways to go about fixing so much right now for our communities, And we're not going to let the government off.

**Dean Askin 09:42**

When I was doing my research for this episode, I came across a new guide that UN tourism published just last November called Accessibility Guidelines for tourism businesses. And I thought, wow, this is kind of, you know, interesting. And they point out two things, you know, when I was.

**Dean Askin 09:59**

Reading the guide, two things seem to be the two critical points that accessibility and disability inclusion need to be embedded in the businesses, operations and culture, and that you shouldn't be aiming for fully accessible. Sometimes we talk about being fully accessible, but accessibility is different for everyone. So where do you think making tourism accessible starts, and what does it start with? Whoever wants to jump in first.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 10:28**

I'll jump in. I'm not shy. I think Universal Design is one of the easiest, or not easiest, but it's the most convenient way. I guess if we're looking at UD, we're looking at what works for most people, and especially when we're building new venues, and we're thinking about it before we even start, it's also a matter of want. And they just prove that at the pair of games, they took a 2000 year old venue and made it fabulously accessible because they chose to. So if you want to, you can do it. If you want to put up walls, you can do that as well. When they tell me buildings that are 100 years old in ferrington, they can't make accessible, and I'm like, But Europe's doing it with buildings that are 1000 years old. So you can, it's a choice. And then making sure that people can get to the venue, it's all fine and dandy to build something, but if nobody can get there, then it just becomes a white elephant and proof that, see, we

shouldn't have built this, and they should just stay at like so there's to me, those are the two basic ways that we can really go about making things better.

**Dean Askin** 11:38

Jamie, I see you nodding your head there.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 11:39

Yeah, I think Universal Design is a game changer, and it's a game changer for everybody. There's no doubt, where does it start? I think it really does start with a level of commitment, and it's a JUST DO IT attitude right now. I mean, I've been involved in human resources for

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 11:56

35 years, plus I've been involved in inclusive hiring various initiatives over the years, leading organizations through inclusive hiring initiatives. But

**Shelley Petit** 12:08

where does it start? It starts at the top, and it starts with a level of commitment to do that, like no longer inspiring stories. It's a level of commitment. It's about

**Shelley Petit** 12:20

just doing this. We have a lot of great information on how to hire inclusively, how to retain people with disabilities, and we don't need one more toolkit in this country. We've got an amazing array of toolkits. I think of ccrw toolkit, disability confidence toolkit. I mean, pick a sector, any sector, they've all got their own toolkits. So we actually have a lot of information on how to do this. We have a lot of organizations that are out there supporting job seekers with disabilities in their job search. So there's great partnerships and collaboration potential. I think that collaboration potential between business and service organizations really can make it simple for employers who are intentional about having a workforce that reflects community and guests, right who your customers are.

**Shelley Petit** 13:14

I think that creates a winning opportunity all around but, yeah, stop. I mean, start using the information that's already out there, and stop reinventing the wheel.

**Dean Askin** 13:24

Jasmine,

**Jasmine Qi** 13:25

okay, yeah, I'd like to echo what Jamie has just shared. It really starts with the leadership and the intention, a clear public commitment to that accessibility is a business priority, rather than an add on practically that could start with an assessment of the base customer journey, business environment or workplace barriers, and appointing, appointing an accessibility champion in their business or workplace, and embedding simple, Universal Design fixes while planning for the long term changes. That's my perspective. Great. Thank you all

**Amy Widdows** 14:07

Yes. Back to me. If I could Innovation, Science and economic development. Canada launched a federal tourism growth strategy in 2023

**Amy Widdows** 14:17

Canada. 365 welcoming the world every day. One of the guiding principles in the strategy is accessibility for all. The tourism sector cannot grow without having a mindset to promote accessibility for everyone. Persons with disabilities not only contribute to the tourism workforce, but also constitute a growing cohort of international travelers. This represents an emerging market that will only continue to grow as barriers to travel and tourism are addressed as such, developers of future tourism destinations and those upgrading existing ones must be mindful about the need to ensure accessibility for all. Was the quote sounds great and honorable when you read it. But what about practicality?

**Amy Widdows** 15:00

Shelley, do you want to take this one?

**Shelley Petit** 15:04

Sure, it would be nice if people could arrive in our country without their wheelchair being destroyed, if that's how they're traveling.

**Shelley Petit** 15:13

You know, when

**Shelley Petit** 15:17

government arrives and we've destroyed their wheelchairs, that's never great.

**Shelley Petit** 15:23

Also transit. I mean, we

**Shelley Petit** 15:26

even to take a cat a taxicab in New Brunswick, it is almost impossible to get a an accessible van from the airports, which is, you know, how are we going to welcome people if they can't get around. So we we really need to work on what that actually means. It's a beautiful image. It's, you know, really honorable, but we need to make it way more practical. And again, that comes to that commitment from the top. It means that there's going to have to be some money invested in it. But we've seen in other countries where they've really invested in accessible tourism, and they're seeing 35 to 40% return on investment the first five years. You can't beat that. And right now, we have to, have to have to take advantage of so many people that have been alienated by America, why not? Let's take advantage. Let's show them what we have here. Let's attract them and keep them here forever. I have no problem with that. Thanks, Shelly. And whoever wants to take the first shot at this question, please jump in. How sporadic Do you think tourism accessibility is in this country, from region to region. In BC, for example, there are over 200 tourism businesses that have integrated some accessibility, such as Braille and lower counters. But then you've got our rail and air transportation systems, which are part of domestic and international tourism. That doesn't exactly have a great reputation when it comes to accessibility.

Shelly, I know you have you've got some great thoughts about the accessibility of tourism down in the Maritimes region of the country. Does anyone else want to speak to this as well? I can start down here in Atlantic Canada. It's we do a great job at not yet disabled, tourism. So for folks who are not yet disabled, we have great tourism venues,

**Shelley Petit 17:28**

but they've kind of forgotten about the rest of us. We started to see a bit of push forward, and then the pandemic came, and then everything stopped again. We have people that try. They go and buy blue mats at Canadian Tire and they go, Look, we have Moby mats. No,

**Shelley Petit 17:45**

no, you don't. So they want to, they just don't really know how to go about it, or they don't have that financial commitment. So we continue to work with them, and we continue to try to show great examples from the rest of the country, things that are happening in BC, things that are happening in Ontario, things that are happening in little pockets here and there, going what we can do. And then we bring it back to the job perspectives. And we bring it back to the mental health perspective, that for us to get out to a venue every now and then is so good for our mental health, and to be able to work is so much more than a paycheck, and we hope by keeping to push that with the rest of the country doing amazing things that we can show as an example that we're going to get there.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 18:28**

I think if I can add to that as well, there's a real difference between some of our major cities and centers, the accessibility in Vancouver, for example, compared to the accessibility in Kamloops when you're in the urban centers that accessibility disconnect is much higher,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 18:47**

and inclusion disconnect may be higher too. I think of the work that has been done in BC

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 18:55**

through the President's group, it's a group of business leaders that are committed to leading their organizations and fairly senior levels, right? A lot of

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 19:03**

the provincial crown Corps are part of that organization, and they've done a lot of work, both internally within their own within their own businesses, but also within the business community. So when we look at so called championing, look at sharing the stories, look at sharing the results, taking a pledge to measure. And that's been a, you know, very successful so far. Very successful business, business to business led initiative on inclusivity and accessibility. One, one organization that's part of that is Pav CO and so that's the Vancouver convention center and BC Place. And it's great that the the new Vancouver convention centers, you know, was built with universal design and considerations in mind. So, you know, there's an advantage when you're doing new builds to make sure that it is absolutely accessible for all. But I think of What? What? Both van.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 19:59**

News did for and it started with

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 20:03**

Britney Spears. Not Britney Spears. What's her name? Taylor Swift. Started with Taylor Swift concerts coming to BC Place for three days, and they wanted to make that venue accessible, particularly, I mean, for all, but particularly for folks who are neurodiverse, knowing that more people would actually go to those concerts,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 20:23**

and so that really prompted looking at full accessibility of the venues and putting in quiet space, quiet rooms, making sure folks who are neurodiverse can get to the front of a line to purchase merchandise, as opposed to wait in a lineup of 20 people and become overwhelmed. Same thing with the Invictus Games going into the Vancouver Convention Center. And BC Place was a real it was a real prompter for them to look at full accessibility. We did a lot of training with them, all of their managers. They did learning videos on accessibility, accessible Guest Services. They did that internally for all of their staff. And one of the findings, it was kind of funny, one of the findings that Vancouver Convention Center was there wasn't a dog service dog relief station. So they had to, they had to put a service dog relief station in at the Vancouver convention center. But as a result, all guests now who have a service dog, who are accessing those venues, who are going to a conference, will benefit from that, you know, as a result of the Invictus game. So I'll just give a little shout out to a couple of our key partners, which is Vancouver Convention Center, BC Place,

**Shelley Petit 21:29**

my daughter, who is an anthropologist, she she's even mentioned that in Vancouver when she goes to multiple conferences, and she's been at both those venues, they have freight they've had fragrance free signs up for years, which is very important, because I have multiple chemical sensitivity. And she started crying when she saw that and said, Look, Mom, it's a place you could go and not only did they have signs up, they had signs explaining what fragrance was. It wasn't just your perfume and she was just that blew her mind. It blew her mind to see that, and it gives our community hope so we learn from each other, it can, and I hope we continue to do so, because we can learn a lot from larger venues that have made progress.

**Jasmine Qi 22:16**

I would also like to add on some of the insights so through the belong project, empowered by tourism nature Canada, we had the opportunity to work collaboratively with our regional human resource organizations in tourism sector across Canada, in different provinces, territories, and definitely, we collaborate with our tourism industry associations across Canada to host workshops, conferences, events in different geographic locations. So through this type of collaboration, we really try to advance the agenda of accessibility, at least to increase employers, as well as businesses in tourism sector, their awareness of accessibility and disability inclusion in their workplace as well as in their business.

**Dean Askin 23:12**

You know, Jamie, from all the things you said about all the pav go

**Dean Askin 23:17**

buildings out there, and I'm familiar with them through lighted up the lighted up friend Dean movement. I mean, it sounds like they've made a culture shift, but So basically, what we're talking about here, and all of this is, is making that culture shift across the whole tourism industry, an entire industry, because it's, it's so well known that, you know, accessibility is most often an afterthought instead of being planned for from the start. So what do you think the inherent challenges are in making that culture shift?

**Dean Askin 23:52**

So to think accessibility and inclusion first,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 23:58**

it's a great question. You know, it's the \$64 million question. Really it's but it is about valuing,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 24:07**

whether it's a workforce, or valuing diverse customers, accessing your business and enjoying, you know, enjoying your attraction, or coming into your restaurant, being able to dine

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 24:21**

and enjoy the experience.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 24:24**

It really is a

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 24:27**

values piece, but it, you know, sometimes it takes, I know, in the case of pavco, you know it, it took someone who had a personal experience

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 24:39**

and wanted to make a difference. It wasn't going to help for her sister,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 24:45**

but wanted to make that difference when you're you know, when your eyes are open, it's kind of hard to close them. You close that thought out. So and so she went with it, and she absolutely had complete support from there's a great job.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 25:00**

Or manager there anyway, but the same as the convention center in Calgary, same as the convention center in Toronto. I just picked them as an example. It really does start at the top and taking that commitment and putting it into action. Is it a?

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 25:16**

It is a it is a transformation. If you look at workforce, if you always source candidates from the same source, put opportunities up on Indeed, you're going to get the same results. So you have to be very deliberate about and intentional about if we're going to go down this road. I always call it the four pillars

of accessibility and inclusion. And that came from a day of bringing all of our employers together when, when I was leading the BC workforce, BC partners and Workforce Innovation, we brought our employers over 80 people together in a room at a Pacific autism family network in Richmond. And it was there was an overarching question to the conversations, the discussions and workshop, workshop content that day. And the question was, what does it take for workforce, inclusion of people with disabilities to work and work well, because we've been doing this for decades, same things over and over and getting the same results. So what do we need to shift here? And lots of great conversations, lots of good feedback. There are flip charts all over the room for people to add comments to.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 26:26**

And when we got back from from from the day, and started to really look at the information, started to analyze the results, it became clear that it took four key things, and I lovingly refer to them as the four pillars of accessible, inclusion and it's commitment starts the job readiness means taking intentional steps to prepare your organization, to shift what it's always done, to do things differently in order to tap into this talent pool. It means preparing managers so that you're not just saying one day this is what we're going to do, is helping people get there right and understand the why, then it's intentional recruitment, so commitment, readiness, recruitment and retention, that recruitment is not passive. It's intentional. We just had a fabulous experience with the Canadian ski Council, and they were they had a position, a guest services Ambassador position. So it's call center, essentially, but one person is taking all the all the calls from anywhere in the country, from all of the ski resorts across the country, any customer at a ski resort across Canada. And they had a position that could work remotely, anywhere, but they wanted it to be someone with a disability, an intentional hire. That's that was the talent pool, and so that's, you know, that's what it takes. They hired a great person, and she's doing just such a great job. They're looking at making this a full opportunity and not just a seasonal opportunity. So,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 27:57**

so what does it take? Yeah, it takes some very intentional steps. It doesn't cost a lot. It doesn't have to cost a lot, but it does. It does require some, some effort to make that shift

**Dean Askin 28:08**

you sound. You sound so optimistic that there are some good things happening. Jasmine, what do you think? What does it take?

**Jasmine Qi 28:15**

I think some of the kind like inherited challenges, really, because of the nature of the tourism sector. So 90, I think over around 98% of tourism businesses actually are small, medium sized enterprises or businesses, or even some type of family owned resorts, restaurants. And for these small size of businesses, they normally have competing priorities, perceived cost or lack of staff or lack of the resources. So these are definitely some of the challenges make the culture shift sometimes is not prioritized on the list, and that's why some of the industry supports are built into the system to help these small, medium sized employers to have the ready to implement type of resources, as long as they have the good intention would like to make a change, they don't need to take so many efforts to find the resources or the connections they need. So that is how the belong project really designed for,

**Dean Askin 29:37**

oh, that's that's a perfect segue into, into the next question I want to ask you.

**Dean Askin 29:42**

You've mentioned a couple of times we mentioned in the intro, Jasmine, you were on the show last season when we explored the belong initiative in detail. And for again, for anyone who hasn't caught that episode yet, it's episode 33

**Jasmine Qi 29:57**

so the belong initiative is really.

**Jasmine Qi 29:59**

Relevant to this discussion. So Tell, tell our listeners and recap for us what the belong initiative is and what's been the tourism industry response to it. I mean, how's it going? Okay, yeah. Thank you for these questions. The belong Initiative is a federally funded pan Canadian project really try to help tourism, employers hire, retain and support people with disabilities through tools, training, employer engagement and practical pathways to their inclusive hiring. So it has been in the sector for almost two years, and I really would like to share we do see increasing participation of the tourism businesses from different type of activities. The project ready designed from the starting with awareness and then making the connection between the employers businesses with community service providers as well as partners, and then to with the support provided to the businesses to make some specific actions in the employers workplaces. So in the past at least one year and a half, we have some direct hire related actions or supports to support employers, including the tourism workplace accessibility clinic as well as talent referral program, where we collaborate with community organizations to engage employers in their local community, because they are normal. Normally, they are the closer partnership, rather than the US tourism nature. Canada is a pan Canadian organization, and we do see increased uptakes of attending workshops in different regions, as well as the employment conferences, and recently, we also launched couple of tourism job fairs where we really engage employers in the tourism sector with the intention to inclusive hiring and bring qualified job candidates from community partners to make the connections, and we do see increased uptakes of these activities from the business perspective.

**Amy Widdows 32:30**

Okay, so I think I'll jump in here and Jasmine, if you just wanted

**Amy Widdows 32:33**

to expand on this a little bit. In your opinion, what has to happen on multiple levels to make our tourism sector truly accessible and inclusive?

**Jasmine Qi 32:46**

Yeah, I think it really takes the aligned action into different levels. First of all, definitely, when we think about the accessible and inclusive tourism, there needs to be the policy and standards, at least setting a minimal expectations and a common frameworks so people has these standards can work with or to guide their accessibility goals in their business or workplaces. And then also, since it we talk about the entire sector's accessible and inclusive journey. It really needs to start with the industry leadership, as

well as business commitment. Definitely, when we have the standard setting up, we have this commitment. There also needs to be

**Jasmine Qi** 33:40

like the fund or budget budgets to support some of the initiatives happening in the grounds, as well as how these initiatives are. The efforts could be measured through KPIs or return on investment,

**Jasmine Qi** 33:58

and definitely in the ground level, there needs to be some practical guidance or support, such as the accessibility audits review, the universal design guidance, as well as how this inclusive hiring could be implemented in a workplace, and the last, but not The least, all of the workforce, or customer facing training or this employment really needs to be driven by people with lived experience, so and then the centralized coordination across all these different layers will support the sector to become truly accessible and inclusive. Thank you for that. That sounds like a terrific framework.

**Shelley Petit** 34:48

I've even got a name. I've got I came up with it from what both ladies were saying start. So next year for now, we had do a focus on this, and it's called one inclusive journey.

**Shelley Petit** 35:00

From coast to coast to coast, and we're teaching everybody about this, from employers to people, developing whether it's a small business, a medium business, an employee to look for, how to ask for the accommodations they may need there.

**Shelley Petit** 35:15

I know here in New Brunswick, they tell us all the time we need the disability community to work. You know, it's a workers paradise. There are so many jobs out there that we cannot fill, even within the government. They need us to work. Okay, fine, but help us to work. Help us to get what we need to work. Stop being so closed off, and we could be doing these accessible job fairs, right it

**Shelley Petit** 35:43

with there's so much that could happen this talent referral program like there's so much that we could learn in Atlantic Canada from areas that have already done it. We just need to start sharing better instead of trying to keep it all inside.

**Shelley Petit** 35:57

And we need to stop trying to reinvent the wheel

**Shelley Petit** 36:01

to put a lot of money into studies and toolboxes like you've already mentioned, and just jump at it and do it. We know now we don't need to spend money on this. We need to shut down that part of the disability industrial complex, and let's just go, go, go, because we know how to do it. We want to do it. Let's go. And this would solve so much of Canada's financial barriers. Right now, we could open up the country. It would be fabulous.

**Amy Widdows 36:27**

So on that note, I guess let's shift gears. What opportunities and business benefits are tourism businesses that don't or are slow to adapt to accessibility,

**Shelley Petit 36:40**

missing out on money people, great staff. There's still this notion that people with disabilities take all the sick time and are not great employees. And if we can break that, I mean, my goodness, we you need someone on your workforce who thinks outside the box. What do you think we've done our whole lives to survive within the system? We are fantastic at it and and most you know, some of us cannot work. Our bodies just won't permit it, but the bulk of us want to work, even if it's part time, just to have that socialization. A bit more money to use our brains. There's so much available there, and businesses are potentially missing out just because they're not aware. And if we can do more to share that awareness, especially with the successes that you know Quebec West have had, I think that would help out Atlantic Canada tremendously. Thank you.

**Amy Widdows 37:40**

Shelly, Jamie, what are your thoughts on that same question?

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 37:44**

So I think there is an advantage

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 37:47**

that isn't getting as much airwaves as it as it probably could. I mean workforce shortages. So I've been in Human Resources long enough to hear for decades that workforce shortages were coming. They're coming. They're coming. Well, guess what? They're here now, and in this sector, they're kind of here to stay. So there's a unique advantage. I mean, obviously, if there's a pool of candidates who are

**Jamie Millar-Dixon 38:13**

interested and available to work in the tourism, hospitality sector, how do we do a better job at connecting the two and and that's a real opportunity, because there are employers that just don't have enough people to fill the vacancies in their organizations, and yet, there's this pool of untapped talent that's sitting somewhere and ready and want, want to work. So I think one, I mean, we've got a real advantage in having Stephanie kedue is our Chief Accessibility Officer in this country. I mean, she does a fantastic job. She's she's out there. She's traveling the world at international events as well, and coming home with with some ideas on how to do things differently. And, you know, having Stephanie talk to the business community in a language that the business community relates to, I think, is important as well. And I think that's the more we can get our leaders in front of other business leaders. Would be a real advantage. But I think, seriously, that, to me, is the key. The key difference is that we have this opportunity to fill there's no more temporary foreign workers, not to the degree that it was in the past that whole program, but yet, we still have to do a better job at connecting people who are unemployed, who want to work, are ready to work, and can go into those opportunities for sure. Jasmine, did you want to add anything to that question? Okay, yeah, I totally agree with both Shelly and

Jamie's comments, and if any employer or business slow to adapt, they really will miss out the customers, the talent, the reputation and definitely the innovation as Shelley.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 40:00

Mentioned that people with disabilities, they are very good at solving problems or facing challenges, come up with great solutions, and then, if businesses are missing these particular

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 40:16

demographics, they will lose the percentage, I think, at least one in four or one in 5%

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 40:23

of the population as their guest experiences or customers, and then they will miss the

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 40:31

they will

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 40:33

kind of like their reputation and productivity will also be

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 40:38

not valued.

**Dean Askin** 40:39

Jamie, I'm so glad that you mentioned Stephanie Kadu, because that means I can sort of mention her again, because we had Stephanie on the show a couple of seasons ago in an episode about the state of accessibility in this country. And I'm always referring to one thing that she said, because just stuck out so much. She said, You know, people have to remember that disability is just another way of experiencing life. So you could extrapolate that and say, you know, disability just another way of experiencing life and and tourism. So I mean,

**Dean Askin** 41:11

what's your vision of truly accessible tourism in this country? And how optimistic are you that will get there, totally eventually? Mean, from what you've said, you know, it's happening in some places. But what's your vision for total accessibility everywhere in the country?

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 41:29

Well, I would love that ideal scenario, but I think,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 41:34

I don't think we'll get to total in our lifetime.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 41:39

Reason is we're, getting there right? It's going to take a lot more. Stephanie KED you delivered the opening comments at a recent event that Jasmine and team hosted in Toronto last week, and she delivers some opening remarks and really, really challenged the sector to do better

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 42:03

and and, you know, talk spoke about her own experiences in traveling, and she does a lot of travel, and she wants to, she wants to have equal access to travel like everybody else.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 42:18

Yeah, I'm hopeful that we will continue to learn from those businesses that have done the work and made that change, and are willing to share that experience and story and recommendations with other businesses. That is a real opportunity that we have in Canada, and a willingness to share that not just keep it all as a secret to that own to that business, but really share it out with the sector, within their own business communities and their own locations.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 42:47

You know, we have an opportunity to speak at and they reached out to speak at the chambers in Fernie and in

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 42:56

what's the other one, Kearney and,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 43:00

oh, forget the other location, but anyway, smaller communities can actually learn from larger communities that have done it right. Transit, for sure, is a key challenge in the smaller communities. People just can't it's not there, and so people can't get to these locations to work in particular. But

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 43:18

I'm optimistic that that,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 43:22

you know, people will be able to experience these big attractions that we have across the country. I think of the ice fields tours, you know, they've got spectacular Columbia River, the ice fields up in

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 43:37

between Jasper and Banff.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 43:40

What a beautiful part of our country, that whole region, and to be able to get out in an accessible, you know, big Truck, Ice truck transfer, and they have that, and you know, they wouldn't have had it 10 years ago. So, you know, businesses are paying attention to that. The Banff Gondola, fantastic facility for being fully accessible

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 44:05

and being able to go in that regardless of whatever your experience may be. I think we can learn,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 44:14

continue to learn from each other. We need to focus on what is working. Where are the gaps? What do we need to stop doing? What can we do more of in order to keep this,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 44:27

to keep this on the agenda and on the radar for all of our businesses?

**Dean Askin** 44:30

I love your sense of your sense of optimism.

**Dean Askin** 44:33

And Shelley. How optimistic are you that things will get there eventually, and what's your vision for accessible tourism?

**Shelley Petit** 44:40

It will get there. Like, you know, as we're saying, it'll get there. It'll be slower down here than the rest of the country, because our population is small, like what we consider an urban center. You guys consider a little drive through truck stop, right? So, but that, that is what it is living in Atlantic, Canada,

**Shelley Petit** 44:58

just so we know Stephanie, it was Steph.

**Shelley Petit** 45:00

Idea wheelchair that we destroyed at the airport here. Yeah, so, but we're getting there, and I think especially in Atlanta, Canada, it's going to take our community to continue to push this and say we want this, not just for ourselves, but for opportunities, for jobs, for opportunities for our children and our grandchildren and our grandparents as they age up. You know, my mom needs a wheelchair now. She should be able to do something as a senior, not just have to sit in her home. So if we continue to push this and then point to the other victories, we will get there. And we have to always remember that every step or roll forward is still progress, and we will get there if we just continue to push it and be part of the solution. We can't just wham, wham, wham, like Charlie Brown's teacher. We have to be part of that solution. Every time we work on being part of that solution, we move things forward and we'll get there. It may not be as quick, it won't be overnight, but we will do it because we're a community that wants it, and then we have great outside partners, like employers, like the government, who are also seeking the value and want it. And if we're working together, we can do just about anything, but we have to all want to do it.

**Dean Askin** 46:22

Jasmine, what about your insider view from the hiring side and creating a culture of inclusion? I mean, what's your vision and how optimistic are you that things are happening and will eventually get there?

**Jasmine Qi** 46:35

Okay, yeah, I really love Shelley's comment about where we need to be part of the solution. I think, definitely is not only one person's responsibility or only hr's responsibility, is everyone's responsibility, since disability is that type of identity, anyone can experience that and at any time of their lives that we don't have any crystal ball to see. Oh, someone, I don't think there is, anyone can be 100%

**Jasmine Qi** 47:06

confident that they won't be

**Jasmine Qi** 47:09

disabled at any time of their life. No one can make that statement. So that's why it's really about every single person's personal responsibility and their social responsibility. I'm definitely optimistic, but I know is a long journey. It's not a one time off of event you participate, or one workshop you participate, and then everyone expect the person will change totally after workshop. So it will take time. It will take all the different stakeholders efforts, and it will require more consistent investment from different levels of the government, of the industry, of the businesses and also employers, accountability. But I'm definitely optimistic to see, because I do see things are moving forward. Are changing in the policy way.

**Amy Widdows** 48:08

So Jasmine, what's the main message that you would want anyone listening to this conversation right now to take away from it?

**Jasmine Qi** 48:17

Okay? So normally, I love my kind of like little note that just do it at the attitude. But today I would like to share more of that. I do think, from a business perspective, the accessibility is not a charity. It is really a smart businesses, and also the dignity, basic rights for people with disabilities. So I'd like to encourage anyone from the business perspective to listen to the podcast. Just start where you are. You assess the journey, fix some easy steps and build on the existing resources or involve people with lived experiences in every step. I think we can all start with a small step, and then it will eventually take us to a full, accessible journey.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 49:12

If I can build on that. I think Jasmine's laid out a really clear foundation for for that in terms of business value. But I think,

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 49:21

you know, businesses don't need to go it alone. There's so much support from organizations like ccrw and sunny Family Foundation, the employment works initiatives and Neil Squire like we've got so many great organizations that are ready, willing and able, or that are national. Business does not need to go it alone. And there's there's free support there for businesses. And I would encourage any business owner, Business Manager, to reach out to own community, see what's available for support, and know that you'd be well supported.

**Shelley Petit** 49:57

And the third, I guess part of that puzzle is.

**Shelley Petit 49:59**

Disability community, as we've already mentioned, anybody can wake up tomorrow disabled, trust me, I learned at 49

**Shelley Petit 50:07**

I was healthy and happy and teaching and volunteering, and then a fragrance got me My heart stopped, and I was I'm alive today because there was an ambulance on coffee break across the street. That's it. That's all there is to it. And it can happen to anyone. And if, maybe, if you don't hit disability that way, you're going to age. And if you happen to age, we tend to reach barriers that put us into that. And if we wait until we need those barriers solved to be part of the difference, it's too late, because it takes time. Things move a little bit slowly. So let's all work now to make this a complete, a more inclusive society, because it's going to benefit every family in Canada in one way or the other, in a positive way. So we have a great country,

**Shelley Petit 51:01**

we can make it even better. I hate using those terms right now, because of someone else, but we can make this just so open and accessible and and available for every Canadian to be the best version of themselves, where we can all be a part of it,

**Shelley Petit 51:19**

but that means we all have to want to be a part of it, and we, we have the ability. So let's do it.

**Dean Askin 51:25**

You have all had such deep insights into all of this.

**Dean Askin 51:32**

Just before we wrap things up, we've talked about a lot, you know, from the inside of the industry and looking outside, looking from the outside, in at the industry. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is important to mention before we wrap up the conversation?

**Shelley Petit 51:48**

I think we've got a piece to this. In many of the provinces, territories, we've got some accessibility legislation. We've got the Accessible Canada Act. And I think there's a, you know, there's a role for all of that as well. This isn't going to be changed because of legislation, though, I think with the legislation, can do is set some standards around certain aspects, but the rest of it's going to be up to individuals to make that to make that happen. So I wanted to acknowledge that, you know, we've done a lot of work in the provinces and territories, in the federal government around the accessibility, the Accessible Canada Act, accessibility legislation, I think, I think it matters what I wanted to add, and I love that worst. Of course, we're behind in New Brunswick, so where our acts are just coming out. But here's the thing we're learning from other provinces, and a big piece of our act is going to be accountability,

**Shelley Petit 52:43**

and people ensuring that accountability is being followed, right, so that you're following the act, and if you're not following the act, that there are repercussions, right? It's not right to a fine and close down the business, but it's about teaching and then bringing people to it. And I think that may be the piece that was missed in some of the originating acts that we may be able to take advantage of here,

**Shelley Petit** 53:08

where we are so far behind. But it is, again, it's, you know, we have to find the positive in that. We can't always look to the negative, which too many people like to do. Let's look to the positive. We're going to we're going to fix the things that were missed elsewhere, and we're just going to help make it so much better. And

**Shelley Petit** 53:25

I may not be here to see my grandchildren and my great grandchildren take advantage of these accessibility measures, but I know here in my heart and in my brain that they're going to and that makes every effort so worthwhile, every effort so worthwhile that's our role in society, is to make it better for the next generation. And I know everybody that's on this podcast is playing their part, and that is the most exciting part of this for me.

**Dean Askin** 53:53

It

**Dean Askin** 53:54

kind of reminds me of there's a big band song called on the actions in Topeka and Santa Fe, and there's a line that says, accentuate the positive and reneeminate the negative. So I guess it's that that's the kinds of things that have to happen. Jasmine, any final thoughts,

**Jasmine Qi** 54:09

okay, yeah, and I think Jamie mentioned that a little bit about the legislation. I also know accessible I think accessibility standards of Canada has published lots of guides standards which can be referenced for the businesses if you'd like, luck you, if you'd like to, like to jump on the journey. For example, I think they have the employment standards as well as the travel standards, so it will be a great resource for businesses to refer to, even though is kind of a voluntary but there are still lots of great resources information included in the standards. And also, would like to shout out to our own belong project, because it's designed to be.

**Jasmine Qi** 54:59

Basically for tourism sector,

**Jasmine Qi** 55:02

with the tourism businesses in mind. So I'd like to encourage our tourism operators, across regions to regions, to reach out to the belong project, and then it will be your one stop shop if you would like to start your accessible journey.

**Amy Widdows** 55:22

What a great conversation this has been. I appreciate the three perspectives that you have brought to this podcast today. We don't get political on this podcast, but let's just say that the geopolitical state of things these days and with Canada becoming a preferred tourism destination more than ever, both domestically and internationally, and with a disability becoming more prevalent as the population ages, it seems to me that the need to make tourism more accessible is a given.

**Amy Widdows** 55:52

Hopefully the conversation we've just had can make an impact on making tourism more accessible. So Jasmine, Jamie and Shelly, thanks again for being on the show.

**Jamie Millar-Dixon** 56:01

You're welcome my pleasure, and thanks for the invitation participate.

**Jasmine Qi** 56:06

Yeah, thank you.

**Shelley Petit** 56:08

Same here. Thank you. It's been a great show.

**Dean Askin** 56:11

Thanks for me as well. Shelly, Jamie and Jasmine and you know, as Amy mentioned, hopefully this conversation will generate more, broader conversation about making tourism more accessible in this country, you know, I got thinking that I always loved family vacations when I was a kid. You know, we'd travel across the country and discover some of the destinations, you know, places like Peggy's Cove in Atlantic, Canada and and on the West Coast, Stanley Park in Vancouver, and sea world, where I got soaked by the killer whale and was wet for nine hours straight. But hey, when you're nine and 10, you know, you don't even know what the word accessible or accessibility means, but I got to tell you, you sure do, once you're older and have mobility issues. I mean, I remember a couple of years ago walking around one of the big tourist attractions in New Brunswick and being desperate for a bench. You know, it was, it was a lot of walking, and there just weren't any. So I guess the important thing to remember here is accessibility helps people who have a disability and benefits everyone, and not just accessibility and tourism. I mean accessibility and everything.

**Amy Widdows** 57:14

And on that note, that's everything for this episode. I'm Amy widows, thanks for joining us. Hope you'll join us next month for another conversation about accessibility, with 2026

**Amy Widdows** 57:25

FIFA World Games, World Cup games happening in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver this summer. We're following up with this bird's eye view of tourism accessibility, with a conversation about making mega events like the FIFA World Cup accessible. That's coming Tuesday, May 19.

**Dean Askin** 57:42

That's right. Amy, Hey, I can't say I'm a soccer fan, per se, or a football fan, for those of you who may be listening from the UK, but I'm looking forward to that conversation. I'm Dean Askin, thanks again for listening wherever, whenever and on whatever podcast app you're listening from, join us each episode as we have insightful conversations like this one with Jamie Miller, Dixon, Shelly, Pattie and Jasmine Z and explore disability inclusion in business and in our communities from all the angles

**Dean Askin 58:17**

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**Dean Askin 58:42**

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