



Transcript

Episode 48: Making the Journey Part 1: Little Mushroom Catering Company

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Dean Askin 00:00

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 Widdows and Dean Askin. Hello there! Welcome to the show. This is episode 48 of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. Our 2026 season is winding down, and we're starting the wind down with an installment of our occasional Making the Journey series, we thought it was a good way to end National Disability Employment Awareness Month 2026, which wraps up this week as October comes to a close. Hi there, I'm Dean Askin. In Making the Journey, we have fireside chat conversations with business owners and business leaders about their disability inclusive hiring journey. This episode is the first of a two-part making the journey series. In episode 48, we're going small, and in the second installment, episode 49, we'll be going big. More on that later.

Liz Gosse 01:15

Hi, I'm Liz Gosse. Here at the other mic, sitting in for Amy Widdows. Small businesses are the economic engine of Canada. 97.9% of employer businesses in this country own small ones, with one to 99 employees. So that's why we're starting off in Making the Journey series with the disability inclusive hiring journey of one of those small businesses.

Dean Askin 01:42

That's right, Liz. By the way, welcome to the co-host chair for the first time. Liz is the director of corporate engagement and training for the Ontario Disability Employment Network. Now, I know you've had a close working relationship with the business we're featuring in this Making the Journey episode, so it's great to have you co-hosting this fireside chat with our guest,

Liz Gosse 02:02

I've been looking for each of us when I come to see it.

Dean Askin 02:07

Hey, there's no pressure. I'm pretty sure this is going to be a great conversation. Now, I don't know if this helps you or not, make you feel a little bit more comfortable. But I once had to do 33 takes of my sign-off for a radio documentary. Nothing like trying to say just six words in minus 35 weather, and you can't get your lips and tongue to work right.

Liz Gosse 02:29

Thankfully, it's summer, when we're recording this.

Dean Askin 02:33

ha! I'm sure you'll be a powerhouse at the other mic. Speaking of powerhouses, Little Mushroom Catering Company in Cambridge, Ontario, is one of those small businesses driving the Canadian economy, and the company is leading the way in more ways than one.

Liz Gosse 02:50

Their mission statement, and this directly from Little Mushroom Company's website, affirms from the first point of contact to the last bite. Little Mushroom Catering is the leader in socially responsible, environmentally sustainable innovative food service in southwestern Ontario.

Dean Askin 03:08

Since 2012, Little Mushroom has won 100 awards, including the 2024 Business Excellence Chair's Award from the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, 2019 Business of the Year for companies with 11 to 50 employees from the Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and 2019 Small Business of the Year from the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce,

Liz Gosse 03:30

Their disability-inclusive hiring journey has played a role in all of this. Christie Johnson is here to tell us about that. She's the director of people and culture at Little Mushroom Catering. She's joining us from Cambridge, Ontario. Christie, thanks for coming to the show to share your experience making the journey.

Christie Johnson 03:48

Thank you for having me. This is a wonderful opportunity to be with both of you and to share what we're doing in our little part of the world.

Liz Gosse 04:00

All right. Well, let's dive in. So, Christy, how did Little Mushroom Catering disability inclusive hiring journey start?

Speaker 2 04:08

Well, it started right from the start. 2010, Stephanie Sulis started the business, and it wasn't long into that business journey and her entrepreneurship journey that she realized she needed to hire employees. That was, you know, a couple of years into it, and and her company has grown and grown,

and now here we are in 2026, and we're between 35 and 40 employees in our max time of the year. On those early days, she has always been mindful of having great diversity in the employees that she's hiring, diversity in ages and maybe where people are coming from, different ability levels. That's always been part of

Christie Johnson 04:58

the

Christie Johnson 04:58

the fabric woven in, or. Should I say the recipe that we use for the staffing component? And since I've been in this role four and a half years now, it has definitely been top of mind as we look to hire and fill roles each year. We work very closely with the employee, sorry, the Ontario Disabilities Employment Network and a lot of their employment service providers.

Liz Gosse 05:25

Oh yes, and we've been working together for a few years now. And you're well connected in the community and work with so many great organizations to support your journey. And how would you describe that journey so far?

Christie Johnson 05:38

It's been a learning opportunity for sure. We keep learning and growing in our knowledge. You know what you know at the beginning of the year. Hopefully, you add into that mix or that recipe as the year goes on, and and what you finish out the knowledge with at the end of the year is hopefully you've grown from that. So we worked closely with the OCTC that you can explain if you'd like to in in your portion. But that offered us an opportunity not just to be putting out the job opportunities to the right communities and support services, but it also allowed us the training center to come into our employees, and we put all of our core staff through a disabilities and confidence awareness training in 2025, and that was really helpful.

Dean Askin 06:38

I'm going to jump in here for a minute. I mean, I'm curious. Based on your experiences, what do you think the keys are to creating an inclusive culture in a small business?

Christie Johnson 06:51

I love that. I think creating inclusivity is all the way through the employee life cycle. In fact, before we even hire people in the telephone interviews that I set up with people now, I have a few sentences that I say to everyone that just helps to share our commitment to inclusivity and diversity within our community, and it also can weed out people that maybe don't feel the same way. They don't have to continue on in the process. But for those people who are looking for that inclusive environment, I mean making that statement right before you know initially with what we're talking about first steps, they know and can hear that we're fiercely protective of that environment as well. So I say that we work with people from all ages, all ability levels. We speak eight languages between our 35 employees, and we work with people from the LGBTQ plus community, he's and she's, they's and them's, and on on staff protective of the head environment.

Dean Askin 08:12

You've been really intentional, and you know there was a there was a Bloomer Financial Group survey several years ago, and it was way back in 2014 that that found only 39 percent of Canadian small to medium businesses have hired people of a disability, and that was like up from just 29 percent the year before the survey in 2013. So here's what I'm wondering: here's the thing. Small small to medium businesses employ over 85 percent of the private sector workers in this country. So, what do you think still needs to change or happen to increase that rather low percentage of smaller companies that hire people who have a disability?

Christie Johnson 08:54

I think they first of all they need to give it a chance, but not feel like they're alone in this. There are so many wonderful community sports supports, at least in Waterloo Region and Wellington County. Here, you know, if you really are wanting to go down the road of making sure that you're hiring someone with a disability, learn from those service providers all the benefits. We've hired quite a number in the last few years, and our attendance is amazing. Their loyalty to the company is incredible. The questions that they ask, you know, because they want to make sure they're getting it right. All of these things that really help the bottom line. I think the biggest thing that HR departments could be doing, or even the employment service providers, is make it make sense to the CEOs. Give those percentages, give those dollar amounts, give those retention numbers, give all of those things that show the benefits, because CEOs, of course, care about the culture, but. They also care about those, the numbers and what matters too. And honestly, through ODEN and the work that Liz does and that that we've been doing together, those numbers speak for themselves.

Liz Gosse 10:12

Thank you, Christie, for sharing. You know, we know that in your disability inclusion journey, it's not all sunshine and rainbows. What are some of the challenges in your hiring journey?

Christie Johnson 10:23

Ah, so I I won't give a name here, but the the one gentleman that we had hired, um, ah, we had had, believe it or not, at Little Mushroom we have like 700 recipes, 700 different menu items that we, and that can be daunting, ah, for anybody to learn those, but this gentleman was hired for a small area that we do offsite, and there were really only 12 to 14 menu items, and so it was much more a much smaller chunk to break off for him to feel and gain that confidence early on, which which was working out really well. Where the the change or the challenge happened was in him plating those things for guests, and you know, so our staff, the CEO, myself, and another person went with him on site to show him, and a lot of his strengths come from thinking very linearly. But when you're going to put something on a plate for you know guests in a in a restaurant or guests at a at an event, linear isn't always seen as artistic, you know. So creative. So you know when you're trying to show him those kinds of things, you know maybe let's not line that up on the plate. Let's and so it was, it could have been a challenge if we had just let him go on his own. So it took a little bit of extra training and coaching. I would say that that was maybe one of the challenges, but the best part was that we had an employment service provider who worked with us and would call every couple of weeks and say anything new, anything different, any challenges. And so she ended up going on site with this young man until he felt confident, and he

actually coined the phrase in his work of organized chaos because for him to switch his mind from thinking very linearly to you know putting it on the plate in a way that wasn't natural to him by calling it organized chaos and by having the employment service provider with him for a number of shifts he got overcome, like he overcame that and got past that challenge. So I would say that was one of the challenges, just with maybe a little bit of extra training there. And the only other thing was when the whole menu changed for that location. That couldn't have again thrown him for a loop or posed a challenge, but right then that was months into it, maybe six or seven months into his employment with us, and the employment service provider still came and worked through for the next few shifts to make sure he felt very confident with the menu and the new way to plate those new menu items.

Liz Gosse 13:19

That's amazing to hear about your challenges, also how you receive support from your employment service provider working those challenges. Can you share maybe a little bit more about other milestones and successes that you've had, including anything that you have implemented as a team after you completed training with the OCTC project?

Christie Johnson 13:41

Yeah, the OCTC project was great. One of the staff members came into our location, and we did a rotation of staff members. Like I said, the core staff going in to do about the modules were maybe about a half an hour on the laptop, but by having that staff person not, you know not being overbearing, not overseeing what they were doing and learning, but being in the room separate from everyone else offered them a chance to share and talk about themselves, their own health, their own journey, what their work life was like here, any concerns that they may have had, we consider our employment, especially HR, because I'm HR, as a place that's very open to hearing these things. But it was so nice to have that third-party person there too. We also put a big flip chart paper up in the wall for any suggestions that came to mind as they were going through their modules: How could we make it even better here? What are the kinds of things that we could do? And so, directly related to your question, Liz, was there were a number of concerns from staff, mostly the staff working in the kitchen, about the noise level when you're in there and you've got you know. 10 catering cooks in there, and the dishwashers going, and the fans are going, and the ovens are on, and it's loud. And there were because we could see this in print on the flip chart paper, some of their concerns, and because of the staff member there, this came up that it could be quite a loud environment. We ended up doing some research afterwards, and we purchased Loop. I think they're called Loop. That might be a brand name. I don't know if I'm allowed to say a brand name, but it basically is not noise canceling. It's the science behind it is that you put these earplugs in, and it takes out the ambient noise, and so you have to be careful in any kind of environment for work that it's still safe. So we purchased one of these, and anybody who wants one is welcome to have one. It doesn't have to be someone who's disclosed that they have a disability. Although we do have a couple of people on site with some hearing challenges, but anybody who wants pair of these, they're in my office. I tell them if they're brand new staff or they any ongoing staff are welcome to come and get a pair. So they wear them, and it takes out the that extra noise of the fans and the dishwasher and the ovens. But if someone were to call them or speak to them, they can still hear that. So, to me, that was a big success story because it didn't alienate anybody or make anyone feel like badly for bringing up a challenge that they had. It was a great way to

overcome something that a lot of people were struggling with, and we maybe didn't even know that they were struggling with it till we had this training session and and this disability and confidence awareness training.

Dean Askin 16:49

That's not only a success story. I mean, that's that's an element of creating an an inclusive culture. I'm curious, and and I guess we've been sort of talking about the OCTC and the and the training you went through. So just for people who aren't familiar, for anyone who's tuned into this episode right now, the the OCTC is the Ontario Corporate Training Centre, and that's an open initiative that has been going on for a couple of years in training businesses and making businesses disability aware. I think I've explained that clearly. Haven't I, Liz? And and and so businesses like yours go through this training. So you've gone through all the training. You've created an inclusive culture. How has disability inclusive hiring made Little Mushroom Catering a better business? I mean, you're award-winning for sure. How has it all made you a better business?

Christie Johnson 17:50

Oh, I think so. I think we attract the kind of people who are looking for an inclusive environment and want to participate in an inclusive environment. So whether that's you know someone that's come from a toxic or bad environment in a past work situation, or whether that's the 15, 1617-year-olds that are looking for their first job and want to feel like they belong somewhere, you know. Water the region, Wellington County. It's a small community. Word gets out, and we we have great success, especially on the the service side, the bartender side of of hiring people who come back every year, year after year, season after season, to supplement their income because they are aware of that inclusive, caring, hardworking for sure environment, but have a little bit of fun along the way too.

Dean Askin 19:01

So you're becoming sort of an employer of you become sort of an employer of choice in in in your region, and that's kind of cool. I mean, I'm wondering. So you've become a better business through it all. I want to get get a little personal perspective here. How has all this you know, affected you. How would you describe your own level of disability awareness before you joined the company, and now, and have gone through all this journey to this point?

Christie Johnson 19:34

Ah, so yeah, that's a that's a good question. So I haven't always been in HR. I have a very eclectic background of work that I did since I got my university degree in the '90s, early '90s. But I think my home is in HR, and when I took this position four and a half years. Go as the only HR person here. I do the full gamut, like the the payroll every two weeks, the the hiring and the other side of that, the onboarding training, making sure that we're staying compliant with everything. But it's it's times like this training that we were able to go through, and the times where we can see the staff coming together to expand their knowledge, understanding, and empathy around other human beings that fills my heart, and just it reminds me that I'm exactly where I should be, and I'm in the right company, and I'm in the right position. I've been able to share this journey around this, and knowing that my employer believes in that, and that there's time and space that's able to be committed to that. Not every CEO, not every business would do that. We just recently, last year, got our B Corp certification, which is another whole

thing we could do another podcast on. But basically, it's about being employers that care about the triple bottom line: people, the planet, and the profit, and I have worked in other places where doing the right thing, you know, knowing more about disabilities or or doing the right thing hasn't always been encouraged, and it's just so meaningful and rewarding to know. At Little Mushroom, we try really hard to do the right thing and have the time and space and resources behind that, not just give it lip service.

Dean Askin 21:50

So you you feel like you're much more disability aware now. On like on a I say on a range of like one you know zero to 10. What would you what would you you know where would you have put yourself like a few years ago, and compared to now?

Christie Johnson 22:04

Probably like a two or a three, but and now I would say I'm a seven or eight. I just still think there's still so much. There's still more for me to learn. I love when I get Liz's emails about you know a rethinking disabilities conference that's coming up. I'm excited to maybe attend that again this year. Like I think there's just always more to learn around it. So do I feel like I've learned myself personally? Absolutely. Do I feel like I still have potential to learn more? Absolutely.

Liz Gosse 22:35

Thank you so much for sharing, Christie. And that's one of our team mottos: is that it's a journey, and you know we show up when we have promising practices, and when we learn, we can continue to learn and grow and do better. And you know, in Cambridge, so I was in Cambridge as well. So I grew up in Cambridge, and I've known about Little Mushroom Company for years. And 15 local catering businesses in the region, in the Cambridge area, do you think yourself think of yourself as a leader in disability inclusion in the community, and are you forging a path for others to follow?

Christie Johnson 23:11

Um, I think we're a leader. I mean, you might have tell me that, Liz. I think we are. We're intentional about it. I think that's the that's the um the piece that keeps getting repeated. We're we're not doing it by happenstance. We're not doing it because someone just happened to come through the door that has a disability and wants a job here. We're doing it with intentionality and with empathy and care, and it just makes sense too because we are seeing those great rewards and the great numbers of of retention and you know cost savings and all those kinds of things. So I would like to think that we're a leader in Waterloo Region. We're hoping to expand a little more into Wellington County. That's our next kind of growth strategy piece. But I think a lot of people and a lot of companies do know us in Waterloo Region, and and if now knowing us as a disability champion, disability network employment champion is is another hat we'll wear. We're happy to to wear that hat with pride.

Liz Gosse 24:28

And when you talk with other businesses, you talk as I've heard you and Stephanie both talk very openly and publicly about our connection and your journey. What's the reaction of other business owners when you share?

Christie Johnson 24:42

A lot of them were really surprised at the low cost. You know, they're like, "Well, you know, what what's the accommodation going to be? What is the accommodation?" You know, and I, I gave. I don't know if I'm supposed to say this, and if I'm not, Dean, you can take it out. But like, even the loop, this was a cost. A cost share, you know. So there was some funding available, and you guys paid half, and we paid half, and yet our employees are able to to have the this here. So I I think it's an ignorance, and I don't mean that in a in a in a rude way, I think people just don't know how much more accessible the information is, the supports are. They they just don't know. There's just an ignorance around, you know. Oh my gosh, it's going to cost me so much money if I have to accommodate a client or an employee, and it really very minimal to no accommodation costs.

Liz Gosse 25:47

Yes, and you know, Christy, we do know from surveys and studies, and the Job Accommodation Network puts out yearly information about the average cost of accommodations, and half of the time there is no cost, and when there is, the average cost is around \$300. So it's not a huge barrier for businesses, and there's so many supports available through different providers and opportunities to look for grants, other services, and bulk support that is for businesses. And businesses are not sure; they just need to ask and and explore those options. As well as there is a global survey in 2023 that found employers think about 7% of their employees actually have a disability, but it's actually closer to 25 percent, and that's a huge discrepancy because most people don't disclose having a disability that's not visible and obvious if they don't feel safe to do so. So, how do you navigate? And you've sort of touched on that a little bit. That little mushroom catering. Let's create an environment where people feel safe. And what's best advice to other business leaders and owners who may be thinking that they don't have any staff who have a disability.

Liz Gosse 27:06

I think normalizing that. I think making sure that there is a person that they can go to that practices more listening than talking and discreet confidence. I think, is important in a workplace too. I would like to say that that should be your HR department, but maybe it isn't always. I think having having a place where people feel like it's going to be acceptable and okay, and you know, not looked upon negatively if they disclose that they have a disability, it just kind of normalizes that, right? And we talk pretty openly about it here. There are people who talk openly about some of the things that they aren't experiencing in their life or diagnoses that they've been given, and I think why that openness it helps others to feel like they're not going to be looked at as strange or so different that they won't be welcomed in. I think, Liz. I've been saying this a lot lately. It might even become my own personal mantra. I think that how matters. You know, you can have a policy in a book on a shelf or on an app, because HR departments have to have policies, right? That's the what you've got to have the policies and procedures. And companies may even have DEI. They probably all have DEI policies and procedures now, and and maybe have included disability functions into that. But how they are with their staff. How they make that policy or procedure more than just words in a binder is what really it's what really matters. I think, and that's really what the robots can't do. That's really what AI can't can't do. They don't have the empathy figured out yet. And so, how we post our jobs, how we use the English language to be inclusive in those job postings. How we converse with people on a telephone call to make sure that they're comfortable. How we welcome them into our place for an in-person interview, being mindful of any accommodations that they may need, and I could keep going through the entire employment journey. The how matter,

and that's what's going to set you apart as an individual, and that's what's going to set you apart as a company.

Dean Askin 30:08

That how is playing a really it sounds I mean sure sounds like that how is playing a really big important role in creating that inclusive culture at at at Little Mushroom Catering. I'm curious, what's been the reaction from the community and customers? I mean, there have been several surveys that you know show consumers are more likely to give their business to companies that hire people of a disability, and the percentages vary depending on which survey you look at. But they generally all say the same thing: that people want to give their business to inclusive organizations. So, what's been the reaction? from like the community at large or other local businesses?

Christie Johnson 30:47

Yeah, I I wouldn't say I am aware that anyone has called us up to book us specifically because we work with people with disabilities, but I do know that there are a lot of corporate partners we have. We have a lot of not for profits, and even our milestone customers, which are just people that are you know doing a birthday or an anniversary privately, we do hear from them that that many times it's because of our business practices that they're picking up the phone and calling Little Mushroom, or they're sending us that email, you know. They are aware that we're in the community, that we do fundraising for different things, that we are a Better Way Alliance member, that we are a Safe Space Alliance member, that we work with. Like we're socially conscious, corporate responsible employers, and I think especially with that Gen Z coming up now, they care more and more about that where they want to give their money. Their money's tight, and where they want to give it, they want to make sure it aligns with their values. I would say that's true of my old Generation Gen X too, and you know, there's we do hear that Dean from people in the community that they, oh, of course, little mushrooms at this event because it's a fundraiser, or of course, you know, they're they're they're looking after this particular thing because they're socially minded, and we like that. We like that feedback, and we do think it plays a part and a role in in what we do and how we do it.

Dean Askin 32:28

It sounds like it must be kind of rewarding and kind of give you the warm and fuzzies when somebody when you find out somebody's called and wants to to hire you because of what you're doing.

Christie Johnson 32:37

Yeah, yeah, it is. It's nice, motivating.

Liz Gosse 32:43

Christie, what do you think the main message that you want small business owners who might be listening to this podcast right now take away from this conversation?

Christie Johnson 32:53

Learn more, take a chance, and and reach out. Be in touch with in Cambridge. Be in touch with the neighborhood communities or neighborhood associations. They're called here. Be in touch with people like you guys at Odin, the March of Dimes, the KW Hab Services. The like I could go on and on. Like

we've got all these partnerships with people. Reach out to them because it's amazing the benefit that they can give when I reach out and post a job with them. By the time I hear back from one of those employment service providers, they've kind of vetted the person already for me. They're making it easier for me because that employment service provider has said, "Here's the job description. Here's the person I'm working with. Do they align for this? They've often maybe even given me a call, Liz, and said, "Hey, I'm thinking about this person. This is, you know, can tell me a little bit more about the job. I just want to make sure it's maybe right fit and align well." Like that's amazing that I don't have to do all that work. You know that that they're doing that on my behalf, and so yeah, just reach out, get connected. They can always call and and connect with me too. I'm happy to share my journey and story. Once you kind of get connected with one, the rest of them sort of follow suit because it's a very collaborative community, and very welcoming as well. You guys live what you what you say every day, and that's amazing too.

Liz Gosse 34:34

And kids, I'd love to ask another personal question: Is what is the most rewarding thing in all of this for you?

Christie Johnson 34:41

Watching those employees have another month under their belt, you know, have another year under their belt, have another chance to, um, yeah, when they're working here and you could tell that they're happy and they're coming into work and they're contributing, they're having lunch in the lunchroom at the. Of us, they're you know they're just engaged in what we're doing. It's it's fantastic. I remember the one person that I was talking about earlier. You know, I think within the first couple of days we had a snack and learn, and that's once a month. We have a different organization come in, and for an hour, they talked to us about different things, and I I base those in the year on the seven elements of self care. So we had somebody coming in for a snack and learned that afternoon. And you know, it's I always think it's going to be challenging to get the new people to come out to those because you know it's a little bit intimidating. There's a room of all these people you don't yet know, and nope. This young man came right in, and and he hasn't missed one since. He hasn't missed a day of work. He hasn't missed a social outing. He hasn't missed anything. He is fun, and yeah, he. That's the most rewarding part for me is when I see I see this place giving them more than a paycheck's the most rewarding for me,

Dean Askin 36:06

Christie, I know you said before the show you were a little bit nervous about coming on the show, but you've been great and you've brought out so many great points for for other businesses to and tips for other businesses to start their own you know hiring journey. I mean, we've talked about a lot, and you've made so many great insights. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is important to mention before we wrap it up?

Christie Johnson 36:29

Um,

Christie Johnson 36:30

I can't think of anything. I think you guys have made great points yourselves and asked some really insightful questions. Just, just that it's a journey. I and Liz, you alluded to that too. That's what you guys talk about all the time. And you know what? If you don't know something, or you make a mistake, or you're not sure where to go, that's okay. It's a learning journey, and and you're gonna just keep. If you have a mindset to be open to that learning, the supports are there for you to help you along the way and and help you learn as you go. So huge thank you for having me on the show, little old me on the show. That makes me have put a smile on my face for sure. And I just appreciate this time to connect and be together and and share our journey at Little Mushroom Catering.

Liz Gosse 37:22

Well, thank you so much for coming on the show and talking about Little Mushroom Catering's inclusive hiring journey. It's been a really great conversation, and I love that your company cares about people, planet, and profit. Because when you care about the people and the planet, then the profit comes. And being very intentional about and building inclusive workplace, we'll have a link to the Little Mushroom Catering website in the show notes. And for any small business owners who want to get in touch with you to find out more about your inclusive hiring journey, way to do that.

Christie Johnson 37:56

You can just email me at hr at little mushroomcatering.com, and I'll be happy to connect. Great. We'll be sure to include that contact information in the show notes too.

Dean Askin 38:07

I've got to say thanks for me as well, Christie. You know, I remember last winter when we were when we were just you know getting down to planning the 2026 season, and I put out a call to the Odin team for suggestions of a small business to feature in this episode, and Liz was quick to email back that we just had to talk to you. And was she ever right? I mean, it's been a great conversation. And Little Mushroom is just doing great things down there in Cambridge. You know, there are still too many common myths about employment and people who have a disability. And it sounds like you guys are just busting them big time. I mean, research and statistics have shown that many small businesses haven't hired people of a disability simply because they don't know how to access the talent pool. So hopefully, this making the journey conversation will inspire and motivate more small businesses to start having broader conversations and start their own inclusive hiring journey. I mean, you're gonna have to let us know if anyone gets in touch with you as a result of hearing about your journey at Little Mushroom on this podcast.

Christie Johnson 39:11

I will. Yes, we'll let you know for sure. Yeah, and it would be great to find out if I've become an influencer of sorts as a result of my first time co-hosting. I'm Liz Gotts, and I'm asking for this now. That's it for me from this episode of You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a D. We did say off the top that we are going baked in our second Making the Journey installment next month. We'll have a fireside chat with Matthew Reese from an Inclusive Hiring Journey at One Wonk, Weber Weave's leading manufacturer of stone in wool installation. Dean, it's been fun co-hosting this episode with you.

Dean Askin 39:49

Hey, it's been fun, Liz. What do you think? Are you feeling comfortable at the mic now enough so much that we can maybe co-host another episode next season?

Liz Gosse 39:58

I think I'm absolutely up for that.

Dean Askin 40:01

Ha! I'm gonna hold you to that. Looking forward to it. As Liz mentioned, that making the journey conversation with Rockwell's Matthew Reese is coming Tuesday, November 10th. You know what? That's episode 49, the second last show of our 2026 podcast season. 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 "Making the Journey" one with Christy Johnson about the inclusive hiring journey at Little Mushroom Catering, and explore disability inclusion in business and in our communities from all the angles, you can't spell inclusion without a D is produced in Toronto, Canada, by the Ontario Disability Employment Network. Our podcast production team: executive producer and co-host Amy Widdows. Our producer is Sue Defoe. Associate producer and co-host Dean Askin. Audio editing and production is by Dean Askin. Our podcast theme is "Last Summer" by Ikson. If you have feedback or comments about an episode, email us at info@odenetwork.com. That's info at o d e n e t w o r k . c o m . Join us each episode for insights from expert guests as we explore the power of inclusion, the business benefits of inclusive hiring and fostering an inclusive culture, and why disability is an important part of the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility conversation. Tune into You Can't Spell Inclusion Without a Dean Podbean, or wherever you find your favorite podcasts.