December 2022 IT Accessibility Community Meeting Captioned Text

The December 7, 2021 IT Accessibility Community Meeting was hosted as a virtual meeting by the General Services Administration, Office of Government-wide Policy.

The conference captioning translations provided during the event are included below, verbatim, and without editing unless otherwise noted.

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(Captioner standing by)

>> Yvette Gibson: Welcome, everyone.

Welcome, welcome, welcome.

If you just give me a second, I want to co‑ host our next speaker, our second speaker, and then we will continue.

Just one second.

We have two wonderful Brandons, and things keep moving.

>> Brandon Jubar: Good afternoon, Yvette.

This is Brandon Jubar.

I'm here.

>> Yvette Gibson: Hi!

Bri is continuing to allow people to come in.

Welcome, everyone, to our final accessibility community meeting of the year.

I am so excited to have you all here and as you know, if you've attended before, the December meetings usually are no frills meeting where we have a lot of fun and so without further adieu, I'm not going to do a lot of talking, because we have two very exciting speakers, and I'm so excited to ‑‑ we have someone new to the community, Sara, and I'm so, so, so excited to have her.

So we're going to just start and we're going to turn it over to Sara.

Sara, please introduce yourself to the community, as we let individuals in.

And we are very excited to have you.

Go ahead.

>> Sara Bedrosian: Thank you, I hope you can hear me.

>> Recording in process.

>> Sara Bedrosian: Thank you.

My name is Sara Bedrosian, I'll speak to you about CDC's accessible communication goals which are to center accessibility and inclusivity and in the spirit of accessible descriptions I'm going to describe myself as a white woman with dark, short hair, wearing glasses and a red and white‑ patterned sweat we are a blurred Zoom background.

I am speaking to lots of experts in the room, and I am going to assume that you know a lot, but I'm going to help share what I've been learning over the past year about accessible communications.

Basically there's some definitions that I'm going to be using.

I'm defining accessibility.

You can read the slide for this, defining disability, disability inclusion, and health equity.

I really want to focus last on the health equity piece, because this is the state in which everybody has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health, and we really see accessibility as a health equity and social justice issue.

So go to the next slide.

Basically, this is also something I touched on.

Accessibility is a really important part of social justice, and health equity.

Today's event could not be more important for us, and it's really an honor to join you today and to be part of your community as well.

Basically people with disabilities of all types represent a very large part of the American public and they are key audience force health communications so it's really important that we make content that everybody and especially the audience can use available as close to realtime as possible.

So basically, part of my learning experience was to see that these accessible communication products might be seen by some as a translation activity, just like another language, but this should also really be considered at the start of the development of any product, not just at the end for best results.

The other point I want to make sure is that accessibility is for people with disabilities, and it is also for everybody, so that basically things like color contrast can help everybody on a sunny day, who is looking at their smartphone screen.

Captions can help everybody, if the room is loud and they're trying to focus on content on a TV screen.

So basically this is something that lifts us all and I just wanted to say that, because I do think part of the framing of accessible communications is to think of them as something essential.

This is something that we do for all of ourselves, all of us.

I'll go to the next slide.

Basically, part of our charge is to practice inclusivity in our communication development at CDC and to use what we are calling as health equity lens, which this basically means in an intentional way, looking at potential positive and negative impacts of proposed messages, and basically we can use this lens in planning, in development and in the dissemination and we do that to be inclusive, to avoid bias and stigmatization and effectively reach our intended audience.

This approach also means getting input from intended audiences before we're done, preferable at the beginning of the process.

In August of 2021, CDC launched the Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication website and I have the slide and reference slide and a resources slide at the end of this presentation, which you will have in hand and you can use to check out some of these resources.

So basically, this basically will help all of us, we hope, address and not exacerbate health inequities and really through the use of inclusive, accessible and respectful communication.

So I'll let you read the slide and you can read the slides later.

One of the points we have here is that health equity is intersectional, so that basically means that people may belong to more than one group, and so we have to think about that when we are developing materials, even if we're focusing on a specific audience.

I'll move to the next.

Basically, this is, we are trying to engage audiences and partners at the beginning, which we mentioned, practicing inclusivity early in the process, not at the end.

So basically we have a few tools here.

These are links also in the resources slide that will help with, you know, community engagement approaches, and this is CDC guidance of some standing that's been available in English, Spanish and French, and then there's a community engagement play list.

This is basically developed with the National Institutes of Health and CDC and the agency For Toxic Substances and Diseases Registry or ATSDR.

We provide these for ourselves and also for public and state territorial, local tribal partners, that they can use through all the phases of community engagement.

So in this slide, this is how CDC defines disability.

This is a slide that shows basically the percentages of people that have one of six defined functional types of disability, and you know, this is basically those six types are mobility, cognition, independent living, hearing, vision and self‑ care, and you will see there's one in four people, adults in the United States has some type of a disability.

That's a lot of people.

So that is really something that we really want to center this audience.

This is something that many people are a part of, and we really want to make sure that we're looking at this as a central issue, not as an add‑ on or something we do after the fact.

So I'll move to the next slide.

So basically, this slide just underscores that this is an important U.S. audience.

People with disabilities, this is another way of looking at the previous slide, and you can see that there are quite many millions of people who have various needs, and basically this is something that we can help address through print, through email, through web, through social media, and especially through audio/visual, communications.

These can be structured and made more accessible to these audiences.

On the next slide is people with disabilities worldwide.

This is more than 1 billion people and this is the World Health Organization's definition of disability.

The sign for interpret is here.

We now put this on all of our ASL videos so they are easily identifiable for people who use American Sign Language.

This is native.

There are many millions of people that report they are either Deaf or have serious difficulty hearing, also many, up to 2 million people who are Deaf rely on American Sign Language for their sole communication with others, and of high school graduates who are Deaf, only 7% read English at or above a seventh‑ grade level.

Many of the reading levels plateau at the fourth‑ grade level.

So basically some people often ‑‑ we've been asked why is American Sign Language interpretation needed when something has captioning or subtitles.

The answer is in part that for some people, sign language is their first language and many people who are Deaf struggle with reading.

In addition, certified ASL interpreters who are trained to keep pace with spoken delivery, that's a real plus for comprehension, while subtitles or captions can often lag behind the action, especially in other languages when ear they translated.

So it's really best to have closed captioning and an ASL interpreter.

I'm really happy that you are modeling this wonderful practice, much kudos to you all.

We also get a question why a spoken voice over track is needed when captions and ASL are presented visually.

The answer for that is that some people who use ASL can be low hearing, meaning they may not be fully deaf but they do know and use American Sign Language.

The spoken voice can also add an additional support to these people, and this may also be helpful for people who are caregivers of people who are deaf but don't use ASL, that can follow a video that has spoken voice.

So there are many different reasons to have many of these different tools available.

Braille is another piece that this is important, because it activates the same part of the brain as reading for sighted people.

So basically we aren't saying that all people should only have access to audio files, and Braille is most important for people without regular access to assistive technology, who access the internet and for people who are both deaf and blind.

So basically, adults with literacy limitations, this is another extremely important audience for us.

Some populations have a greater burden of low literacy, including older Americans and people who live in medically‑ underserved areas.

This is intellectual and developmental disabilities or IDD, they are also more likely to be admitted to the hospital from COVID‑ 19 complications, to have higher rates of staying in intensive COVID units and people with IDD often do not have the information they need to protect themselves.

So basically, the Plain Writing Act is the law that requires us to use plain language, but basically it also means that of about 130 million adults with low literacy in the United States, basically read below or at the equivalent of a sixth grade level.

What we want is for people with IDD to express their wants and needs and take care of themselves and learn and develop at the same pace as others without help.

And some of them also may need help, so there is a variety of materials that we can develop to help provide that help for them.

Basically this is a slide a little bit more about why these materials for people with IDD are so needed.

There are wide many millions of people with intellectual or developmental disability.

Some of those live in a community or with a roommate and are independent.

Some of them have a caregiver.

Again, there's a wide range of abilities here and we need to be flexible and meet those needs.

So basically, as we've been mounting new ways of developing accessible content, it became clear to CDC that we needed to position accessible communication more clearly at The Office of the Director level.

So I'm in the office Of the Associate Director For Communication and basically really increased our leadership in this area of inclusive communications through the formation of this new, accessible communication unit.

This is in the new Division of Communication Science and Services and they're looking forward to learning from you.

Also please basically we'd like to collaborate more with our colleagues across the federal government who have much expertise in this area.

We're using a new COVID‑ 19 accessibility contract as well as funding some existing translation contracts for American Sign Language interpretation.

Basically we are continuing to learn and grow and identify how we can make these processes more part of everyday work across the agency.

So again, this is something that is almost seen as a luxury in some areas, you know, and basically it's a necessity, so we are working hard to make that clear.

Basically we've been working a bit with the National Library of Medicine, the National Eye Institute and the National Cancer Institute among others to discuss ways to collaborate and learn from our federal partners.

We've also recently started talking with the National Federation For the Blind newsline as a potential channel for delivering audio files as well as Braille, and basically our main goal is to ensure that CDC communication is as clear and understandable to people with disabilities as it is for people who do not have disabilities.

That is a quote right out of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

>> Yvette Gibson: Sarah, if I could interrupt just a sec..

>> Sara Bedrosian: Of course.

>> Yvette Gibson: Like New York and New Jersey, we talk fast.

>> Sara Bedrosian: Sara.

>> Yvette Gibson: Slow down just a tad bit.

>> Sara Bedrosian: I will.

I'm sorry, thank you so much.

You're right.

I'm a New Jersey girl.

So basically, our goals for this new unit around the slide, we really do want to basically provide the leadership, provide coordination to help develop and promote these audience‑ centered tools and trainings to share best practices, to build agency capacity, and basically to also engage people with disabilities as trusted voices and advisers.

I'll move on.

Basically this is something that helps people, as we discussed earlier.

We know that the federal websites must be 508 compliant and that is the law, and we are doing that.

But there is, we take this very seriously but this is basically, accessibility is also, as I said earlier, an essential component of social justice and health equity.

So basically this should be considered at the start, and we see the accessible communications space as something that is more ways to help people find the information they need and have it be in the form that they need it.

So there's some of these additional ways listed on the screen.

I've mentioned them already.

I will move on.

So basically, as I alluded to earlier, we've been partnering with various organizations in 2020 and 2021.

We partnered with the CDC Foundation and also with experts from the Georgia Tech Center for Inclusive Design and Innovation and the University of North Carolina Center for Literacy and Disability Studies to help shape this suite of COVID‑ 19‑ accessible products, and now we have a new COVID‑ 19 accessibility contract with RTI International this year, and we're basically creating content on vaccinations, boosters, testing, and basically translating this guidance for priority audiences such as people who use ASL and Braille, as well as for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities and extreme low literacy.

So basically, this is also addressing the adult caregivers who use accessible communication products to support somebody who has a disability.

We're also interested in working with influencers and national organizations that already have these networks of trusted community‑ based organizations.

So we know that not everybody finds information on our website, and we're working hard to make sure they can find the information where they need it.

To the next slide.

So basically, part of this new COVID‑ 19 contract is to do some concept and message testing with target audiences.

We're doing social listening.

We're doing literature reviews.

We're hosting group discussions, focus groups, and individual interviews to understand unique insights.

Next slide.

So basically the development of resources is fairly comprehensive.

We try to target the most important needs, knowing that the COVID‑ 19 response, the guidance has changed over time, as we've learned more about the science behind the disease itself, and how it spreads.

So we focused our priorities on certain topics and made sure that there was a range of different materials, as you see on the slide.

Right now to date as of November 2022, we've developed three new ASL videos on vaccines for children and teens, and for parents of kids with disabilities, and also improving ventilation to stay safe at your house.

We've also developed four easy‑ to‑ read pages on ventilation, staying safe when people visit, getting a COVID test and preventing the spread of COVID‑ 19, and we have two suites of materials that are more interactive to be used with the caregivers for people with IDD and ELL.

These include a video, a social story, an interactive social story and a poster, and they're meant to be used in a dynamic way between the caregiver and the person that they're giving care to.

Some links on the slide for ASL for the YouTube channel and for the current easy‑ to‑ read materials.

On the next slide I'll talk briefly about other materials planned for this winter.

We have more easy‑ to‑ read pages.

We have more Braille resources and we have seven new ASL videos in the works, and I just wanted to make a note that this is the first time that CDC has created any Braille resources.

Before this, they were created through external projects such as with the CDC Foundation‑ funded Georgia Tech project and were not branded by CDC.

This is new territory for us.

Basically once these material are finalized, we're planning to spread the word through ad campaigns, either Google or other social media platforms.

We're going to partner with influencers and we're going to develop and share a social media promotion toolkit with key partners, so we hope that will help get the word out and have lots more to come here.

Basically we're also developing some training and national best practices on emergency response communication for people with IDD or ELL and their caregivers.

So you can see the background.

We have like some previous tools, and we're doing some current surveys, as I mentioned before.

Basically to expand the evidence base on this tool, more to come in winter of 2023.

And then I just wanted to say that we really are very aware of how challenging life during COVID‑ 19 has been.

It's very difficult to explain it.

It's very difficult to live through it.

It's very difficult to communicate about it.

So we have some materials here for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their care providers.

These are examples.

You can go to the link and basically for those who may not be aware, the social stories are this tool to help children prepare for real‑ life events so they can help ease anxiety or set expectations for behavior in a certain situation, such as getting a COVID shot ahead of time.

They can kind of work through this with their parent or caregiver and basically some of these materials have instructions for the parent or for the caregiver source that they will know how to use these materials most effectively.

The next slide, I'm going to show that we are doing some other accessible communication activities outside of that particular contract.

Basically we're trying to expand the translation of health information into American Sign Language, and basically we know this is accessible communication is a priority for the agency, and the focus is increasing daily.

We know that ASL videos do take a bit more time to promote.

We are now including simultaneous live ASL translation.

Any priority a director addresses emergency response, town halls and other events of that nature, and now we are also as a part of our suite of vital signs products that come out on a monthly basis, on high‑ impact scientific findings on various topics, we are now including ASL translations, English and Spanish of vital signs materials.

One recent one on sickle cell anemia and another one on flu.

We are also developing some outbreak‑ specific ASL videos for various topics such as food, water‑ borne or zoonotic outbreaks such as the salmonella turtle outbreak that happened recently and develop a larger accessible communication landing page that will allow visitors to CDC and partners in others to basically filter for the specific topic they're interested in, and also the specific format, such as ASL.

So we're very excited about that and we think that will be very helpful hopefully for many people.

So basically, in summary, I just want to give this as a call to action.

I am including myself and all of us at CDC in this.

Basically we know that people with disabilities represent a large proportion of the American public.

They are key audiences for health communications, and just as it were even more importantly, people with disabilities deserve to access the same information as people without disabilities, and this is both ethical and legally right.

So this is our collective call to action.

We need to plan.

We need to develop.

We need to use these strategies to make accessible communications from the very beginning.

We need to look at everything we do through this health equity lens to engage directly with our intended audiences, if possible, to do as much formative research, including focus groups and message testing as is feasible, and to partner with organizations who advocate for people with disabilities and listen to them.

We hope you will join us to ensure that all Americans can have access to the information they need to thrive and I thank you so much.

I will stop here.

I won't go to my last two slides, which as I mentioned before have references, and also resources.

So they are there for you to use and please, feel free to send me any feedback.

I'd love to hear what you are doing in more detail.

I hope I will hear that in the next presentation, and in the subsequent festivities.

Thank you again.

>> Yvette Gibson: Woo hoo!

Thank you so much, Sara, and before I go on, I failed to do something in my moving so fast.

My name is Yvette Gibson, African American female and I have on the queen's holiday hat with bell earrings, so you can't see my hair, and a red top.

Sara, we welcome you to the community and thank you for the wealth of information.

There was a few questions on the statistics, but I'll read the first question to you that comes from Jeanne Atkins.

"Is it possible the percentage of people with disabilities is much higher than many are uncounted

>> Sara Bedrosian: Thank you for that question and yes, I believe it is possible, very likely.

I am not an expert in the research of the is it theistical counting but I think it's fairly certain that these are low end and the other point I made during my presentation, many of us will become at some point in our lives disabled, either permanently or temporarily, so there really is a continuum of disability and I think that you know, there is, you're absolutely correct, I believe the numbers are undercounting.

>> Yvette Gibson: Thank you for that.

The next two questions are related to statistics.

One's from Peregrine, I hope I said your name correctly, and one is from Bethany.

The first is, is there a source for the statistics in the USA?

The other one is can we get the references to the source for statistics?

There are two slides that she didn't share.

Those will be posted, the whole presentation will be posted on Section508.gov and her reference slides will be a part of that which is posted on Section508.gov, but you can go ahead and answer that, Sara.

>> Sara Bedrosian: I don't know if I can answer that accurately and specifically.

I'm showing my references slide now and I invite to you investigate that, and see if this will help answer some of the questions, and then we have our resources here as well.

If there is a specific question, please feel free to email me at eri7@cdc.gov and if I don't know the answer, I can try to get you the answer.

>> Yvette Gibson: Eri7@cdc.gov.

>> Sara Bedrosian: Thank you.

>> Yvette Gibson: Do we have any more questions for Sara?

Well, great.

Thank you, Miss Sara.

We so appreciate you for sharing with us today.

Thank you.

We're going to now, I'm going to turn this actually over to Bri Canty, who is my sidekick in all of today's event.

Bri, you are now in charge.

You're on mute.

Take yourself off mute.

>> Bri Canty: Thank you for that.

Sorry I'm using a second screen.

My name is Bri Canty.

During the break during the two presentations we'll have an accessibility superhero contest.

Our first superhero is Captain Capptions the lifesaver, Angie L. Fuoco, the U.S. EPA.

A super heroine with hearing loss who pulls out lifesaving captions on an app anytime someone who needs them.

Unable to read the masked lips she holds up her phone showing app generated captions that allow her to read what she can't hear.

Our other superhero, Professor Prudence Pennywhistle, known as Paula T.

Her agency is the IRS.

She is decked out in her Harry Potter Hogwarts gear wearing a hat and holding a wand and preparing to present her Intro to 508 class to her squad of accessibility folks.

You have a chance to vote for your accessibility superhero of 2022.

The poll should pop up in Zoom in just a moment and you can vote from those two options.

I see some votes coming in.

Thank you.

>> Yvette Gibson: Oh, yes, I see them coming!

Once you have voted, feel free to take a break until 1:55.

We will be ‑‑ let's change that to 1:50, since we started a little early.

After you voted, please take a break until 1:50.

We'll be sitting around chatting so if you want to sit and chat with us until 1:50, you're more than welcome to do that.

Don't forget to vote.

Thank you, Bri.

>> Recording stopped.

>> Yvette Gibson: Hello, everyone.

It is 1:50, and welcome back!

Welcome back!

Let me put my camera on.

This is again I'm Yvette Gibson, and I have on my queen holiday hat, and we're just celebrating on today.

Red and white hat, I'm an African American female.

I have on bell earrings and a red top, a red jacket.

And we are just really happy to have everyone here and I am thankful that Sara came through to bless us with her presentation and now we are going to ‑‑

>> Recording in progress.

>> Yvette Gibson:  ‑‑ turn this over to my dear friend, Brandon Jubar.

Brandon, are you ready?

>> Brandon Jubar: I think so.

Let me see if I can get my camera going here.

>> Yvette Gibson: Okey doke, over to you.

>> Brandon Jubar: Are you guys able to hear me alright?

>> Yes, we can hear you.

>> Brandon Jubar: Alright, good deal.

So I am Brandon Jubar. I will do a little formal introduction later, but just to brief introduction now, I am the Branch Chief of Quality Management at the U.S. Department of Labor, and I am a Caucasian male.

My pronouns are he/him/his.

I am wearing glasses and I have my Superman T‑ shirt on today, so in honor of our superheroes of accessibility.

>> Yvette Gibson: Yes!

(Applauds)

>> Brandon Jubar: I have short brown hair and a graying goatee which they tell me is common when you hit your mid‑ 50s.

So I am going to share my screen here.

See if we can make this happen.

Okay, this is looking weird for me.

I can't tell if you can see it or not.

>> Yvette Gibson: We can see it.

We can see it.

>> Brandon Jubar: Alright.

Good deal.

So today staying with our theme of accessibility superpowers, I got thinking about superheroes and what we see in the movies and on TV, and it's really about sharing stories.

When we go to see a movie or we watch something on TV, it's not just about the facts.

It's not just about the abilities or the superpowers, but it's about what those superheroes face.

It's about the villains even that they are up against.

Whoops.

Went too far.

So this idea of stories.

We tell stories all the time, and if you know me, I tell lots of stories.

The reason I do that is because stories, they can be a lens through which we interpret our experiences.

So if you think about, I can think back in times where some things went horribly wrong, nothing went right.

It was miserable at the time, and not long afterwards, sitting around with family and friends laughing about it, looking back at this thing where everything just went to heck and we're laughing about it, because that's the lens that I was looking through.

I was looking at it through the lens of humor, and the story I was telling myself was that this time that was extremely difficult in the moment was actually kind of humorous, when you look back on it.

That's the way we can interpret our experiences with the stories that we tell or the way we tell those stories.

Stories have the power to change people, and create this desire to change.

One of the things that I talk about all the time is that we can't just ask people to change their actions and not give them any good reasons to.

So often, facts and statistics yes they back up what we say, but they don't tug at the heartstrings.

They don't get at the emotions of it, and so many people make their decisions ultimately on those emotions, right, on that gut feel, on that instinct.

Stories give us power to create something inside of people that gives them the desire to make the changes we need them to make to start improving accessibility.

Stories allow us to understand the world in new ways.

Whether you're religious or not, you're probably familiar with the idea of parables.

A parable is basically a story that takes something you're familiar with and connects it to a new idea that someone is trying to teach you.

So when we tell stories or share story, superhero stories or any other kind of stories, we can uses those stories to connect to what people already understand and help them look at something else in a new way, and understand that differently and really grasp these new concepts we're trying to tell.

Like I said, we tell ourselves stories all the time.

So why not tell some superhero stories.

Now on the screen here is this nice picture of me, the formal picture, not with my Superman T‑ shirt on but with my suit and tie, with the flag in the background.

This is not a superhero photo.

This is just mild‑ mannered Brandon Jubar.

As I said, I work for the Department of Labor in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management within the office of the CIO.

I am the Branch Chief of IT quality management and DOL Section 508 program manager.

I have a small team of people that are the accessibility experts.

I am the 508 Evangelist and the storyteller, so I was very happy to be asked to tell some stories to you today.

So let me set the stage a little.

The following slides are going to contain generic facts.

They are based on real‑ life scenarios.

We took the real people names out and changed the situations a little but we wanted to present some real life scenarios, one I'm trying to do in the slides, I'll show you, when we look at the generic facts, okay, the facts are there but we missed the story.

We missed the story and when we miss the story, that's when we miss the superpowers.

That's when we miss the superheroes behind these stories, that are doing all these great things so I will cover the facts.

We'll cover the facts and the slide.

And then tell you the story behind it.

We're sticking with the superhero theme so the stories aren't exactly real‑ world but we've changed a few things but I think we are sticking with the real actual superpowers, though, when I'm telling you stories.

And at the end, I'll ask you to maybe share some stories of your own.

So I don't know that there will be a whole lot for you, a lot of content for to you ask me questions about, but as we're going through this, think in your own mind if it reminds you of anything, because we will have some time to share some other stories at the end.

Okay, well, it's almost story time.

So our first scenario, James, is an employee with a visual impairment and he has to create and conduct a presentation in a virtual setting for predominantly sighted audience.

So he has to have advanced assistive tech skills.

He has to have a keyboard‑ centric knowledge of Microsoft Office products which he'll be using.

He has to create the slide deck, so he has to be able to do that and ensure the presentation is visually formatted correctly, and obviously when he's getting set up, he needs to make sure that his web cam is aligned to capture his face and upper body, and not looking at his chest or at the ceiling.

During the presentation, he has to share his screen, speak to the slide deck, and monitor questions in a chat.

He has to ensure his assistive tech doesn't disrupt or interrupt while doing the presentation, and just as a side note, if he were doing an on‑ site presentation, he might use a refreshable Braille display instead of wearing headphones or having audio come out of his computer.

That's the facts.

That's what we are used to presenting, we present facts all the time.

So let me tell you the story behind these facts.

James was an employee in Fed Town, toiling away for years but James wasn't your typical mild‑ mannered employee.

No, he spent his days fighting crime trying to defeat all those who after 20 years still refused to create accessible ICT.

James had a visual impairment, so he was no stranger to putting forth a superhuman effort in order to get the job done.

One day, while our hero was minding his own business, a track was sprung, suddenly James found himself tasked with creating and conducting a presentation in a virtual setting for a predominantly sighted audience of senior managers.

Prepping his advanced assistive tech skills, our hero jumped into action.

Using the mouse wasn't an option for James because, well, he can't see it.

By utilizing his superior keyboard‑ centric knowledge of the Microsoft Office applications, he was able to quickly select the tools he needed from the Microsoft ribbon.

Now, thanks to his awesome imagination, plus his knowledge of the subject matter, James was able to create an entire slide deck for the presentation using Microsoft products and his screen reader know‑ how.

Most superheroes need a faithful sidekick to help him in a pinch and that's what Clark did.

James put the core content together, he perfected the flow of the material, and then Clark pitched in to ensure the presentation was visually formatted correctly.

James had used IRA, a visual interpretation service, before, but preferred to call on his trusty sidekick to ensure that all those abled people out there were accommodated as well.

Now before delivering the presentation, James had to make sure his camera was aligned to capture his face and upper body.

Easy to do when you can see what your camera sees.

Quite a bit trickier when you can't.

Once he was all set up, James had to share his screen and speak to the contents of the slide deck, which he couldn't physically see.

He had to listen to his screen reader, which was talking through his headphones at about five times the rate of the average adult speaks, and he had to monitor and respond to questions in the chat, all at the same time.

That's a good thing he developed his superpowers of extreme focus, excellent listening skills, and the ability to task switch at lightning speed, between the presentation and the online video conferencing app, otherwise, James might have been completely overwhelmed.

Well, when he was finished, he was praised by his division director for the great content he had shared and for his excellent presentation skills.

As he signed off from the meeting, he got back to his on‑ site presentation, where he had to mute the speech output from his screen reader and use a refreshable Braille display instead.

(Sighs) Just another day in the life of a superhero.

Switching back to our generic fact mode, another scenario, also with James, who is an employee with a visual impairment and in this scenario, he has to use a new, inaccessible IT system.

So he needs immediate to advanced assistive tech skills.

He has to be able to articulate and none strait the inability to perform required tasks, even when his assistive tech is enabled.

He has to be able to demonstrate that to management.

He has to manually label elements on the screen to make them navigable and actionable.

He had to get the AT vendor, assistive tech vendor to develop a script so the assistive tech could complete specific tasks and luckily he didn't have to remember a bunch of specific consequences of multi‑ layered keystrokes.

So that's the generic, boring facts.

Let me put my storyteller hat back on and tell you what really happened here.

So you see, every superhero has a weakness.

Superman the most OP, overpowered hero imagined, still had his cryptonite, and James was no different, but like every superhero with their spandex onesie, he had to keep fighting, even when the accessibility deck was stacked against him.

So not long after his victory over the online presentation, James found himself face to face with his old nemesis, TKS.

He thought that battle had been one but like the Phoenix, a new timekeeping system had arisen from the ashes of the old, and James found himself struggling with a new application that had the same old anti‑ accessible powers.

This time, no one else seemed to be on his side.

The agency, the people in the suits pulling the strings behind the scenes had made a significant investment what they had been led to believe was a truly accessible application.

When James tried to explain the issues with them, they smacked him with the vendor's VPAT which they said stood for virtually perfectly accessible tool.

James was facing an application he couldn't conquer with his assistive tech schools and plucky attitude alone.

If he wanted to get paid, we to find a way to record his time.

If he didn't want a rebellion on his hands he needed to figure out how to approve time sheets for his direct reports.

Even though James couldn't completely defeat TKS with his advanced AT skills, they still proved to be extremely helpful, and his excellent communication skills, plus his patience with people who don't get it at first, anyways, allowed him to get through to the suits.

So the agency called in the reasonable accommodations team, and James was able to get his message through to them and demonstrate his inability to conquer the necessary timekeeping tasks, even with his full array of assistive tech superpowers.

Now James was very advanced screen reader user so he was able to find some ways to manually label elements on the screen that were then navigable and actionable when his instance of the screen reader was enabled, but that wasn't, still wasn't quite enough to defeat TKS.

But with the help of the RA team, James called in some high tech support.

The vendor of his assistive tech was able to write and install a script that gave his assistive tech the super boost it needed to perform in a way that finally gave him the ability to complete at least the specific basic tasks he needed in order to defeat the evil TKS.

But James knew that like every other super villain, things could change down the line and TKS could rear its ugly, inaccessible head once again.

Well, at least it wasn't like the e‑ travel system.

To defeat that super villain, James had learned and memorized specific tasks and consequences of multi‑ layered keystrokes just to complete certain basic tasks.

Ugh, it was exhausting being a superhero especially when all of these things could be easily accomplished if the applications simply complied with Section 508.

But James isn't the only one we will talk about here today.

We'll talk about another employee, her name was Sarah.

Sarah also had a visual impairment and she was tasked with completing and submitting benefit forms during the onboarding process when she was hiring in for a new position.

Sarah was able to independently review and very efficiently make desired benefits using assistive technology.

She was able to review the selections before the final submission of the benefit selections, just using her assistive tech, and Sarah in the end felt very included in this company‑ wide process.

That's just kind of the boring, generic facts.

Here's the real story.

So while James was battling TKS, a good friend and former colleague, named Sarah, was over in Techopolis where she was just starting a new job, and like James, Sarah had a vision impairment, so she was ready for the worst case scenario, but to her pleasant surprise, her new employer seemed to have taken the time to ensure that all of the form fields within that online application were accessible, so she was able to very easily make her benefits selection.

Sarah was able to independently review and very quickly make her desired benefits selections using just basic assistive tech skills.

She barely had to flex her AT muscles, and the compliant system let her, it actually let her review, easily review her selections before submitting them.

For the first time in a long time, Sarah felt included in what's usually kind of an annual company‑ wide process, and her privacy was protected, too.

When she told her good friend, James, about it, he wondered if it was time for him to hang up his cape and join her someplace that didn't require a superhuman effort to accomplish every task.

So we will move on to another scenario here with Margaret.

Margaret was at the same company as Sarah.

Margaret's an employee with an ability impairment, and she has to use in this scenario inaccessible application to complete a work assignment.

To do that, it required intermediate to advanced assistive technology use skills.

Margaret had to be able to articulate, clearly explain and demonstrate the inability to perform these required task and show that to management and reasonable accommodations folks and show them even when the assistive tech is enabled, she could do certain thing.

As an advanced voice command user, she was able to create custom voice commands to perform actions and the AT did end up developing a script that would help her complete certain specific tasks.

Margaret did end up having to memorize some of the complicated sequence of multi‑ layered keystrokes to create the required reports.

Typical scenario.

Kind of boring.

Let's get into the story here.

Even though Sarah, her initial experience at this company was fantastic, let's face T the grass is always greener over the septic tank.

It nt did' take long for Sarah to figure out that her new employer maybe wasn't running an accessible udeepia after all.

Given her initial experience, she was kind of surprised to find out there was an active disability group within the company.

Sarah wasn't sure what her focus would be.

What was there to battle here at her new employer?

The first superhero she met in the league was a woman named Margaret who had just been reassigned to a position that required her to use an application which was known to not comply with Section 508.

It was known to have accessibility issues.

Of course it had the same old evil origin story.

The organization had been Wooed by flashy functionality and big promises and made a big investment in this application so they weren't going back on it.

Margaret used voice commands to operate her computer.

She had limited mobility and dexterity so she mastered her various software tool using certain commands that executed keyboard commands and she could usually outmaneuver her co‑ workers who were slowly clicking through their layers and layers of menus.

The date of the software she was required to use was immune to her superpowers.

She was responsible for creating reports using an application that basically resisted her at every turn.

Sarah wanted to help Margaret, so they hopped on the bat phone, which was fully accessible and contacted James over in Fed Town and James explained his experience battling the evil TKS and assured Margaret her advanced AT skills with assistive tech would still be extremely helpful.

He coached her on how to get through to management, and Margaret was able to communicate with them, and the reasonable accommodations team.

So when she demonstrated her inability to create reports using her assistive tech with the data app, they were shocked.

Margaret was a known superhero in the company, so any application that could stop her in her tracks was kicking up some bad mojo but Margaret wasn't about to go down without a fight.

Using her advanced knowledge of her assistive tech, she was able to create a handful of custom voice commands that performed actions even when the application was trying to require non‑ standard keyboard or mouse actions.

It was like a battle of wits with a stubborn, evil computer.

Eventually our hero couldn't defeat the app on her own.

They needed to call in the AT vendor, the assistive tech vendor to write up the power‑ up script to perform in a way that complements Margaret's superpowers, gave her the ability she needed to complete her work.

Unfortunately, she also had to memorize consequences of multi‑ layered commands but at least she didn't have to recruit a faithful sidekick to help her create the required reports.

As Margaret, Sarah and James sipped on a beer and chatted over the bat phone afterwards they all agreed that the world would be so much better such a better place if everyone just learned how to comply with Section 508.

If they can learn to be superheroes, can't everybody else learn to be law‑ abiding citizens?

One last scenario.

This is another scenario with Margaret.

Things did improve a little.

Again, Margaret had a mobility impairment.

She was able to easily and efficiently generate interactive maps for public use.

She could fulfill job responsibilities independently creating any desired type and could create maps faster than other non‑ disabled peers because of her ability going through the menus quicker using voice commands and ended up becoming much more respected by her peers and management for producing quality work quickly and easily.

A nice, happy but generic, fact‑ driven story.

The real story isn't completely about Margaret.

It's about a young man named Jasper.

Jasper teched in Techopolis with Sarah and company.

He witnessed the colossal struggle with the app.

Even though Margaret seem to have prevailed, Jasper couldn't stop thinking about the superhuman effort that she had put into that fight and Jasper started thinking imagine what Margaret can do if the application, if it was compliant.

Imagine what she could do if her applications worked with her assistive tech.

Imagine the possibilities of someone like Margaret could focus all her superpowers on doing great work, rather than spending so much time and energy on overcoming obstacles in order to even do some work.

Jasper was blown away by possibilities and he decided to do whatever he could to remove those obstacles for folks like Margaret.

So Jasper was leading a team that was develop this map generation app, that would display location‑ based data.

He went back to his team and he mandated that everything they did from that point forward was going to be Section 508 compliant.

It was a heavy lift, because most of them never needed to ensure accessibility before.

They weren't always sure how to do it.

Even though he didn't have a team of superheroes, Jasper was able to ensure that the final product allowed anyone, especially users of assistive tech, to easily create multiple types of interactive maps for public use.

The tool was accessible.

So was the output.

Now, when Jasper shared the tool with Margaret, she was able to independently create every type of interactive map that was available in that tool, using nothing but her assistive tech.

Before long, she was creating maps faster than her non‑ disabled peers, using her assistive tech superpowers.

Margaret became even more respected by her peers because she was able to focus her time and energy on producing extremely high‑ quality work quickly and efficiently.

And before long, Margaret found herself being offered promotions and other opportunities because she was able to focus her superpowers on doing great work.

So those were just a few stories.

We need to find our own.

You need to find your own.

And most of us, if we look at our lives, we can find stories whether it's people we know or our own personal experiences.

I at this point in my life, I'm not dealing with a disability, but my cousin is, and he has for let's see, since 1989.

He was struck by lightning, my cousin, Scot was struck by lightning in 1989.

Paralyzed from the waist down.

Sorry, I get ‑‑ I get a little emotional sometimes.

My cousin, you know, obviously it slowed him down at first, but once he put his mind to living his life and fighting against these obstacles, did some amazing things.

He's a four‑ time, sorry, four‑ time paralympianand 2008, 2012, '16 and '20.

This guy has traveled the world, and twice he's won medals.

He won a silver in the shotput and won a bronze in the shotput.

He's a year younger than I am, so I'm 56, he's 54.

He was 52 in 2020, when he went to his last Paralympics games.

He's a five‑ time World Championship competitor.

At the World Championships for shotput for basically the paralympianWorld Championships and won four silver medals in 2013, '15, '17, '19, and that's just these two things.

He has a whole laundry list of stuff that's done and things that's won.

And yet there are times where he doesn't use a computer very often.

He doesn't use a ton of technology, because a lot of stuff just really isn't all that accessible.

He can't always go everywhere.

I remember when we were watching my father graduate, he went back to school when he was 50 years old, I think.

He graduated with his law degree, and we went to watch him graduate, and it was in this old building in downtown Lansing, Michigan and no wheelchair‑ accessible entrance.

Scot went to the loading dock and got lifted up the freight lift in the back and go through a cargo freight elevator and this round‑ about way to get to the auditorium to see the graduation.

You look at a story like that, and we can understand that, anybody can understand that.

Sometimes it's hard to wrap our minds around the difficulty with using technology, but it seemed to be a lot easier for people to wrap their heads around something clearly physical, physically inhibiting, like I use a wheelchair, and I go there and there's nothing but big steps and a narrow door, and they make me go around to the back alley, and they lift me up like a piece of freight.

That's easier for people to understand.

So treat that as a parable.

When I talk to people, I can tell them that story and I say, you know what?

When we give someone a work‑ around, we give them a means of doing something, what we're doing is we're sending them down the alley to the back and through the cargo freight elevator in order to get to the information that everybody else gets to get to just going through the front door.

People start to get it then.

They go, oh, yeah, it's not just another way in, or yeah, here's your alternate means, and that would be like saying, well, you know what?

We can't even get you into the auditorium to watch the graduation, so you can watch it on this little screen over here because we'll live‑ stream it for you, but you don't get to be there in person because we didn't make this accessible.

So we can find our stories.

We can find things like this and use these stories to teach people the human side of this, to let them understand that this just isn't about ‑‑ we look at it, we deal with it all the time and look at it and one in four, at least one in four people in the U.S. has a disability.

Holy cow, that's a huge number but for so many people you tell them that, they go, wow, yeah, but it doesn't go much deeper than that.

If you can find one story to put a human face to all of this then you start to make a difference.

You raise that awareness and create the desire to change.

That's when people are open to it.

They want to change.

Now we can train them.

Now we can give them the skills that they need.

Now we can help them fix the processes and build accessibility into everything that they're doing from the beginning, but if we just try to do that from the start and don't get them to fully embrace what we're doing and understand in their hearts, at that gut level why this is the right thing to do, we're going to have a much more difficult time of making things happen.

So I encourage you, find your stories.

Share your stories.

We all know superheroes.

Many of you on this call, on this meeting are superheroes yourselves.

Find your stories.

Tell your stories.

At this point, I would like to actually hear from some of you if we can do that, Yvette, I'd like to hear some stories.

Tell me some superhero stories of your own.

>> Yvette Gibson: Feel free, raise your hand, come off mute and share your story.

I'll start with mine, Brandon, then.

Four years ago, I was in a bad car accident, four or five.

Four.

I lost my hearing in one ear, and I was already, I had just started in the position that I'm in now, and I was still learning this position while navigating my own new, I call it, I don't like calling it disability.

I like to say different ability but navigating through this new world that I found myself in, and in the midst of that, I was learning things about the community and I think that was the first time I understood why people don't self‑ identify, because they don't want to be treated differently.

They want the tools that they need to do what they do, need to do without being treated differently or like they can't do something.

And so I understood that, and I'm still learning, but I since have gotten most of my hearing back, but it made me very much aware that it only takes something very small, a bump on the head, an accident or what have you to move you from one place to the other.

So if I could just start from the beginning and make the world accessible for everybody, that's where I am.

It's not just ‑‑ it's for everybody.

I don't care what you look like.

I don't care what your different ability is.

I don't care about any of that.

As long as what I do gives access to everyone, that's my goal.

>> Brandon Jubar: Thank you, Yvette.

>> Yvette Gibson: You have two hands.

You have two hands.

Frances and then Angie.

Frances?

You have to come off mute, Frances.

>> Frances Smith: Good afternoon.

My name is Frances.

And [ indiscernible ] a little bit in the chat but I worked for the government for quite a long time, and I took a promotion from Kansas to Colorado, and I really love my job.

They love having me.

I am an expert in a lot of design and layout for Rocky Mountain Research Station and became a valuable person on that team.

I have never lived in an area higher than 823 feet elevation.

Where we ended up moving was 6,000 feet elevation, and within a couple of months, I became very ill and COVID had hit, so I was at home working, fully remote, because our office was closed and this started in 2020.

This was the first time I started working for the Forest Service so I was new to the agency, and was really worried once our offices started opening up, I wasn't going to come back into the office because I was that sick during the day because of the altitude.

I was able to talk with my supervisor and I was really surprised, this was this year.

I finally had enough.

I couldn't handle being sick every day, and I was.

I was literally sick every single day, all day, and I talked with my supervisor, and because of everything that I had contributed and made improvements on for our publishing services, they didn't want to lose me on their Section 508 for like media expert.

I streamlined processes and made them all electronic instead of having to have wet signatures and paper files, you know, everything's being archived electronically, created templates for a lot of people to be able to use, did a lot of 508 training.

I mean, so many things that had been going on, and our office had been closed until June of this year, because in that area, COVID remained in the red.

So we were not opening offices.

Being able to work fully 100% remote actually worked for me.

My job allowed it.

When I finally had enough and said I'm going to be moving and had the serious talk with my supervisor, she worked with other people to come up with a way that I could keep my job.

They gave me a reasonable accommodation to allow me with my medical documentation to move where I wanted to and designate my job as 100% remote so they could keep me and my skills and I'd still have a job.

We moved back where I came from, which is Kansas, and it's been the best experience I could ever imagine.

They worked with me having time off to move.

They worked with me in making sure all of the equipment they've been sending me packages with extra equipment I need for my job.

If I need it, they've bent over backwards, which is a complete change for me after working for the Department of Veteran Affairs at a hospital.

The Forest Service request I work at, they really do care about the quality of life of the employee, because if their quality of life goes down, when they know that their production goes down.

So a lot of people didn't know I was sick because I hid it very well, but working remote gave me the ability to hide it a lot from people, and my boss did not realize how sick I had been.

So since I've moved, my energy level is sky‑ high.

My production has just gone tremendously up.

I've got major, big projects that have been put on my plate.

People know how to reach me.

I mean, it's work great, and I was really impressed with how the Forest Service as a government entity really looked out for staff, looked out for their staff and bend over backwards to make things work for any type of accommodation that person needs.

This was because of where I lived, and it was very rare, you know.

You don't have employees coming out of the woodwork saying, well, I can't live here anymore because I'm sick every day because I'm too high of elevation.

It's not common, but my reasonable accommodation specialist had actually had an employee that had the exact same thing I did.

So he was able to pull from his experience working with that case to apply it to mine and within 30 days, everything was completely done, and I got permission to be able to move and we found a house and I got moved in August and then my husband just spent the time closing up the other house and moving our stuff.

So you know, to me, I wouldn't consider me disabled, but that is a disability.

That is a disability.

I never knew I would have anything like that.

So it can come out of the blue, just by moving in a different location.

So thank you for letting me share that.

>> Brandon Jubar: Thank you for sharing your story with everyone.

What it reminds me of, though, is the opportunity we have when it comes to remote work.

We were supposed to do a, supposed to be part of a panel discussion this morning with the DEIA Summit that's going on, and they had technical issues and everything was down, so it didn't actually, we didn't have the panel discussion, but one of the questions they wanted us to talk about was the opportunities that we see with the more acceptance of the hybrid work environment, and one of the things that I wanted to talk about and point out to people was, we're still in many ways hung up on the butts in seats.

If people aren't sitting at their desk in the office, how could they be possibly working?

Sorry, having been a manager for almost 30 years now, if someone's going to slack off, they can do it just as easy in their cubicle as they can at home.

So it's just ridiculous.

>> Frances Smith: There are other ways to measure accountability, when you're remote.

There are ways to measure it, and in my honest opinion, there are certain people where it really benefits, because I am the caregiver of a 100% disabled Veteran, after he got out of the military with 27 years, and we have found that my work is so much better when I'm not having to stress over what's going on at home with him emotionally, because he can easily walk right in my office right now and say, give me a hug.

I really need one right now, and then he leaves and we're both happy.

And my boss has noticed an improvement in my work because I don't have people stopping by my office and interrupting my train of thought, and what I'm working on, and since we're short‑ staffed, I happen to be the only one doing layout right now, so I need to be able to concentrate on my work, and I think if people take a closer look at even if you do it as an individual basis, instead of a job classification, you may find that there are skills that staff people have that are not being taken advantage of that could be really put to use in a remote or hybrid environment.

>> Brandon Jubar: Absolutely.

>> Frances Smith: I'm glad to have that opportunity to be able to be a good example of working in that type of environment.

>> Brandon Jubar: And where they have jobs that can be done fully remote, think of the untapped potential in the portion of the labor pool out there where commuting to a job is a significant barrier for them.

I've known people that didn't apply for jobs they would have loved to do but they didn't want, they couldn't make the commute.

They couldn't do it.

They're out of the running, highly‑ talented people and the job could be done with the right technology and the right measuring and tracking and oversight and all of that and not that we need to hound people but we need to trust people, give them things to do, keep an eye on their productivity, make sure that they've got what they need.

I just think we're missing a huge talent pool out there because we're still stuck in this mentality of butts in the seats in the office.

Sorry, Angie?

>> Yvette Gibson: Can you see the next person?

Yes, Angie.

>> Angie Fuoco: I don't know if you can see.

Yes, you can, hello.

I just wanted to add a couple things.

Thank you so much for your stories, everyone.

They're beautiful.

I also had the hearing thing.

Hearing is the most common workplace problem that can be elevated to disabling levels.

I started government deaf in one ear, and really because I was used to it from being a child had no problem, I had no problem disclosing.

I'm like okay, over here, I just need to be up‑ front in meeting and so forth.

I had my way of adjustments, but when hearing loss hit me out of the blue, unbeknownst to me, and started decreasing on my only hearing side, it really took me aback, and my agency wasn't prepared.

Ironically, my agency at the time was big on 508 compliance, but they only talked about it for the visual issues.

So I didn't know that I was entitled to 508 compliance and things that would help me for the hearing issues.

So I want to emphasize to all of you things I know, as I was out there in the disability and accessibility field.

80% of disabilities are acquired, and really every one that was mentioned today that Brandon started and that we all have mentioned here on have been acquired disabilities, and people don't know what is happening to them.

They don't know what is available to them.

So I want to encourage everyone to be the accessibility experts that we need to be for all colleagues to keep them working, because this is just the biggest thing out of DEIA really what President Biden did last year in putting the "A" on there was huge, because CDC's estimates are underestimates.

They're the best they can do.

I'm not criticizing, but they are self‑ reported estimates and not based on test data and test data is really, really hard to get for the number of people with disabilities.

With the pandemic, it was estimated that one out of five people could be developing a mental health challenge, even as these last three years have transpired.

So we're talking huge, huge unknown numbers of excess, of people with disabilities which I believe Microsoft has a worldwide issue to determine what that is.

So again, people are coming to us to work in the federal government from all over the world.

Don't know what's available here in the U.S.

Don't know what's available because most of them are developing a disability, and if we are experts at accessibility, that's just the most wonderful gift we can give to our colleagues, and to me, the best part of DEIA, because like Yvette said, it affects people of every color, of every orientation, of every belief, of every culture equally and across the board, and definitely it's not a welcome experience, but we can learn so much from it, and thank you all for all your stories today, too.

So alright.

>> Brandon Jubar: Thank you, Angie.

Yes, obviously there is lots of work for all of us to do, in helping others, and it is interesting looking at the chat, and hearing some folks talk about disabilities.

I worked in manufacturing for the first 16 years of my career, and my hearing, I have good hearing.

I haven't suffered any hearing loss, but I have tinnitus, however you pronounce it, very loud ringing in both ears, mainly in my left ear, and my wife really thought that I was losing my hearing, because she would be talking to me, saying things to me and I wouldn't hear her.

What I found out was I had been compensating because the ringing is so loud in my ears, I get extremely focused on something, and I tune everything else out, and what I found in the office is that it's very hard to tune everything out, and I was getting exhausted trying to stay focused on work.

Since I've been working from home, since the beginning of the pandemic, I have complete control of my environment, and my productivity has gone through the roof.

I'm so much more focused.

I'm so much ‑‑ but I had never really thought of that as a disability.

It's just something that I dealt with, but yeah, maybe changing the frame of reference and the stories I'm telling myself, I go, well, actually, I was dealing with something.

It was a road block, something that was causing me to work harder, to use more energy to do something that other folks many cases didn't have to work at hard.

So any other stories that anyone wants to share?

>> Yvette Gibson: Brandon I see a very interesting comment from Betsy, who says that the focus should not be on disability.

Sounds like a justification for needing to make it accessibility for a particular person or because of a specific disability.

The focus should be if we build accessibility ICT and include the accessibility ‑‑ hold on, I'm trying to read ‑‑ >> Betsy Sirk: I'll try.

I'm trying to say I love the story.

I agree.

I like all the narrative.

I will say the words preaching to the choir, because even though we all need to hear it, we're hearing ways modeled in which we can communicate, but what I get concerned about, because I experience all the challenges out there, trying to get people to think about accessible IT as the right thing to do at the beginning, not because someone has a disability.

It seems like they think we only need to do this because of this particular person has this type of accessibility challenge whereas the narrative should be flipped to say hey, what we found is that the better design comes from inclusion from the beginning.

So it's a way of design thinking, and the example that I can use that I read in a book, but I've heard it and being on panels in many of these conferences, we all hear that how many of you that do not have mobility limitations, are not in a wheelchair or perhaps with a cane benefit from a ramp?

Well, as the mom of three kids who are now all sons in their 20s, I don't know what I would have done if I didn't have a ramp to push a stroller up, or any kind of ways in which we use things that, oh, my God, well, that wasn't designed specifically for that purpose, but if you think about people and just in general, what would benefit them, and if you're in crowded rooms, loud rooms, I have captions on all the time because of the ambient noise.

Whether I'm watching TV or what have you.

So do I ‑‑ I'm developing more of a visual issue but I technically didn't have that, didn't have an auditory issue.

Aging.

I do now.

I'm not hearing frequencies that I didn't realize I was missing until there was this electronic LiDAR I was trying to use and my kids in their 20s are going what's that horrible, high‑ pitched, it acted like a dog whistle.

If you're in your 20s, you could hear it.

At my age, I can't.

I'm saying this is wonderful.

I love this, but I'm just thinking, turning my thoughts to how do we convey that we're not just doing this because it's the law.

I speak with industry a lot because I'm the chair of the piece of the subcommittee, if you will, under the Accessibility Community of Practice that does industry outreach.

So my big push to industry is, why would you want to make your products accessible?

Well, it's called market share, and I can use this wonderful content that's been provided today to help show the numbers and reinforce the fact that it's not just the U.S. law for the agencies.

And it's not just the moral imperative or the right thing to do, but it gives you a competitive advantage if you market and build and market your products to the biggest audience possible.

So my challenge is ‑‑ there's Angie, one of the superheroes saying "preach it!"

Didn't mean to do the soap box thing but I love this and I love the ideas in this community as how we get people to just see the benefit, not because there's a particular disability out there.

We shouldn't be ‑‑ we should be agnostic.

This technology.

You follow the standards as a long‑ time software developer, they're not difficult.

They are not, oh, my God, this is so hard to incorporate.

They're not!

They're good development practices.

So how do we throw down that gauntlet?

How do we get that challenge where people are just considering this the right approach, because of all of those other reasons, not just because it's the law, and it's the right thing to do, but it's, you know, so that is it.

I will end that.

You just made me think about it from a different perspective, that's all, and the stories get you thinking about that.

And the wheelchair and the ramp and the stroller are always a good one for me to make a mental picture, because I don't know what I would do if I didn't have a way to, you know, manage three little kids under 5 and get them upstairs.

So thanks, everyone.

>> Yvette Gibson: Brandon, before you jump in, let me say thank you, Betsy.

You are preaching to the choir!

We are going to, Brandon, I'm going to let you take it over again.

We have two comments from Jeanne and David.

I'm going to ask that they try to keep their comments to like five minutes or so, because I don't want to ‑‑ we'll be losing our interpreters shortly so I want to make sure that we get their comments in.

Okay, Brandon.

On to you.

>> Brandon Jubar: I was going to say thank you, Betsy, for pointing that out.

And just to clarify, these stories that I shared were designed just to be really focused on one person in their struggle.

We know that it's so much more than that.

But what we found at the Department of Labor is if I can get someone to identify with that story about that person, even though it's just one type of disability and one specific scenario, I can raise their awareness and I can get them, to want to learn more.

Okay, yeah, I understand a little bit now.

Then we need to start explaining all of the other disabilities, but also the fact that, yeah, it's just good design.

In fact, a lot of our training starts from the premise that this is just good overall design when you're putting things together, when you're developing stuff, and if you think about accessibility from the beginning, and just include it with all of your other requirements, then it isn't something separate.

It just becomes what we do here.

So yeah, I absolutely agree with that.

That's kind of the disconnect is, you know, sometimes we get stuck arguing about a metaphor.

I say that accessibility is like this, and then I get people arguing.

We argue over the metaphor.

I'm like stop arguing over the metaphor!

It's a metaphor.

Let's argue, focus on the issue.

Stories kind of open the door but then we need to have the facts.

We need to have the information then to share once people are open to it.

So let's go, to I don't know who had their hand up first.

David is first on my screen.

>> David Jones: Hi, everybody.

Again, thank you for the stories.

I think these stories at the end are so touching.

The reason I am so fascinated about this is a person with a disability going through the workforce recruitment program myself, and figuring out processes of going into the work space post‑ college many years ago.

I was lucky to find the workforce recruitment program, and that's, you know, wrp.org, it's a DoD and Department of Labor program.

My comment is, how can we make sure that we're messaging to the next generation that the government is a great place to enter into the workforce, and getting it out that we have so many programs for bright, young talent to take steps, and I mean I look at all the people that have come before us that we're standing on their shoulders in amazement with the ADA, the ABA and everything going on.

How can we get this out to the next generation?

Within the WRP it's an amazing program but it takes amazing federal partners to say I would like to get an intern and bring someone under their wing for the summer or a little bit longer, but I hope that you guys take a minute to look in.

We tried to on a monthly basis do lunch and learns.

Our next one is actually January 10th on inclusive environments, and having someone from the U.S. Access Board talk about, you know, what this all means, and how it affects all of us, like we're all talking about today, but again, thank you so much for everything that your presentations, I'm just very moved by all the messaging.

Thank you.

>> Brandon Jubar: Thank you, David.

And the WRP is a program that I know some folks on my team are involved in.

We support it at the Department of Labor.

Fantastic program.

And that's, you know, a great example of when I was talking about the opportunities we have, if we get really good at this hybrid work, and being able to support remote work, yeah, I saw in the chat some people were saying not all jobs lend themselves to remote work.

Absolutely.

I agree.

But we structure the jobs, and we structure the work around different positions, and if we wanted to, we could consciously create jobs that are very well‑ designed for remote situations and now we've got a huge, huge talent pool that is open to us.

But we need to get out and tell them that.

We need to make sure that they know we're looking for them, and that it's a good place to work in the federal government.

So thank you, David.

Jeanne, you had your hand up, too.

>> Jeanne Etkins: Yes thanks very much and thanks to everyone who spoke.

This is just such an important topic.

I just wanted to follow up on something that several people have talked about, and that is how do we move ahead?

The other comment I heard repeatedly, we need to accommodate people up front and I'd like to ask everyone to ‑‑ I want to turn all that on its head and ask you to reframe it, and to think of it as really just diversity, and one of the things we need to recognize is all of us here have implicit biases, and the way that we talk about "disability" or rights in the workplace reveals our implicit biases.

Recently, I gave a presentation on gender‑ inclusive language, and my focus was on reducing health disparities, when we recognize our own implicit biases and I use someone from our own web pages, for example, the cancer rate for women has decreased in the last so many years.

Well, if we remove that gender language, women, it forces us to recognize that, well, if we were ‑‑ that white women maybe that's true, but Navajo women, perhaps their cancer rate has skyrocketed.

So I think if we can think along, sort of use that as a way of framing this whole discussion about making it enabling people to work.

I mean, everybody has strengths and everyone has disabilities, even the people who don't think that they don't have disabilities.

They do, but the workplace is set up to accommodate whoever's in power, and right now, not to pick on you Brandon, but right now, I mean IT is the one who is running the communication in the government.

And they are decided what accommodations and where those accommodations should be.

While I know they're doing a lot of important work to help a lot of people, even the word help right there sort of, it shows our biases, right.

Perhaps I don't need an accommodation in IT, right.

I might have a disability that I need accommodation in some other way, so I just wanted to throw that out there and just ask everyone to maybe think differently about this whole issue, and maybe we could come up with some innovative ways to make some of these inroads that we think are, that have great obstacles in front of us.

So thank you so much for this opportunity.

>> Brandon Jubar: Thank you.

Just one final comment that came to mind, as you were talking.

I don't believe that accessibility is an IT issue.

I think it's an ownership issue, because the reason IT is making decisions around communications technology is because the people who own the funding, the agencies who own the funding have just given that responsibility to IT.

They've abdicated their responsibility.

I don't think that a mission application, the IT shouldn't be making any decisions about the functionality.

Yeah, we have to ensure the security of it and things like that, but how it works and who it works for, that ownership needs to belong with the people who own the funding, and if they did that, we wouldn't, in IT, we wouldn't be able to get away with launching inaccessible products because the accessibility requirements would be built into their requirements and they would demand it.

Right now, they fight with us.

They go, okay, yeah, I need this functionality.

You figure out how to make it accessible.

>> Jeanne: That is an excellent point.

Not to interrupt you but you hit the comment I made in the chat box, that disabilities are really defined by those who are in power, and all of us are in many ways disabled at many times, but most of these disabilities are accommodated in some way, because they're deemed acceptable or not acceptable.

So thank you so much for your point.

>> Brandon Jubar: Yep, thank you.

I think we're, Yvette, I need to turn it back to you.

I think we're a little over time now.

>> Yvette Gibson: Oh, yeah, but it's fine, as long as there is another person, I will allow her to comment, Shelly and then we can go on until about 3:30 and we'll end there.

Or if not before.

>> Shelly McCoy: Great presentation as usual.

Some of the comments that I've heard is kind of interesting, and so since I'm on the IT side of it, we talk about, you know, whoever is in power but let's get realistic.

It does not matter who's in Congress, who's in the White House.

It matters about who's in your agency.

And whether or not they take this seriously.

It has been the law for more than 50, 60 years, ADA.

Until there are major fines issued against the agencies, and I'm a proponent of this, it's never going to change, because when we do IT, it's about how quick can you get it done, how cheap can you get it done and how quickly can you deploy it.

That's why they don't put in the effort needed to begin with, because they are under toes constraints, and if everybody actually ‑‑ unless you're in an uber giant agencies that have all kinds of money, I spent my entire career in Department of Labor, so I can only speak from that perspective, and I spent all my career within one agency until the shared agenda happened and that's the perspective.

They don't have the money.

They don't have the money.

They don't have the manpower and until true investment is put in there, and if you're in an enforcement agency, your money's going towards enforcement in keeping the American worker safe.

So I just wanted to throw that out.

>> Brandon Jubar: Thank you, Shelly.

I had an interesting conversation a year ago with someone at the Department of Labor.

There was a mission application and accessibility issues and what it was going to cost to correct these things, and this person told me, this person said they absolutely understood and really wanted to, knew that accessibility was important and really wanted to do what they can, but this person said, "We can't afford to divert more of our mission funding for something like accessibility, and I said, do you realize what you just said?

You just said that anyone with a disability, they're not part of your mission.

That's what you're saying.

Because if they were part of your mission, then you would see accessibility as a wise use of your mission funding.

Not as diverting your mission funding, so it really does come down to, it's like if you get ten pieces of functionality that you want to launch, guess what?

You've got the money for ten pieces of functionality.

Maybe if you have to make them accessible, you only launch eight of the new functionalities so you can make them accessible.

It's not about not having the funding.

It's about not being able to spend it on the accessibility.

And it's because we think of accessibility as something separate, it's easy to say I can't afford the icing on the cake right now, and that's where I think we're really missing the mark.

>> Shelly McCoy: That's the point, we're great at protecting outside but we don't protect with inside.

So that is a conversation, you know, you guys know me.

I'm always preaching about this, but I really do appreciate at least the attempts being made.

You can lead them to the water but you can't make them drink type of scenario sometimes.

>> Brandon Jubar: Right.

>> Shelly McCoy: Thank you again.

>> Joseph Key: Thank you very much.

Can you hear me?

>> Brandon Jubar: Yes.

>> Joseph Key: Great.

I agree with a lot of what everyone is saying about how we get the money and coming over from the Homeland Security side where an issue got started, a lot of accessibility as I started to learn more about it was tracking along with cyber security prior to 9/11 and unfortunately, you know, cyber security was there prior to 9/11, but it took unfortunately something bad to happen, everyone says we have to be secure.

We have to be secure.

And I see some of that also in how we look at accessibility, as I would tell some of my engineer colleagues when they were doing IT up at DHS, I said, so we understand that you're not going to make that website secure, I mean not going to make that website accessible until some Supreme Court justice's nephew misses his plane going to Harvard to get into med school because he couldn't read the sign or somebody who is related to one of our government officials unfortunately they die because of it not being accessible.

And I think another piece of it is that some of the people don't realize that we're missing a tremendous resource.

I had the opportunity to hear Paula Briscoe.

I don't know if everybody's familiar with her, but she is an intelligence analyst within DISSA and what was so significant about her is that she is legally blind; however, to become an intelligence analyst, she had to take high tactical training, so she literally had to take the driving training, they had people doing invasive driving.

She had to go out on the rifle range and qualify and she did it, and she's an excellent military analyst.

People come to me and some of our other agencies and say if somebody's in a wheelchair or somebody has a seeing eye dog, something like that, that's that area.

Someone with an accessible challenge can't perform well in our area, and the thing I say is, when we don't include people who have exceptional ability, I call it exceptional ability, we're missing superstars, and I'm like Redd Auerbach, if you're pink, purple, polka dot if you can help me win the game, I don't care.

I don't care about your accessible challenge.

You can help this organization win?

Come on board.

So I hope it is not the former case of something bad has to happen where accessibility because we didn't have it in there, people lost their lives.

We're going to get better, I believe it.

>> Brandon Jubar: Yes, and I think it's, you know, yeah, most of us working in 508 accessibility now, we see the massive change that needs to be made, and you know, a lot of it can be driven by agency leadership.

Actually not just, you know, putting their foot down and deciding they know how to improve things but listening to us and supporting our ideas on moving our agencies, but we're sitting at DoL a lot of movement when it comes to just kind of rank‑ and‑ file employees.

We are improving things slowly just at the grassroots level because that's where the stories are resonating and people are going, oh, you mean I actually can make a difference?

I can learn how to do my little job in a more accessible manner, and we're like, yeah, you can and we'll teach you and we will coach you and give you the skills you need.

Now it's not only they're looking at the it going Holy cow, I have to take 30 different classes and learn all ‑‑ it's like, no, we'll just teach you what you need to do your daily work in an accessible manner.

Now those folks are talking about it and going okay, (inaudible)that I can improve.

We can start at a grassroots level and make progress without buildings having to fall on people.

So I would encourage you to, like I said, that's where stories are really resonating is with real people on the ground doing their daily work.

Any other questions, comments?

Snide remarks?

>> Yvette Gibson: I don't see any, Brandon, so of course, you'd know, you're one of my fave fab guys.

Don't tell your wife [ laughs ] one of my favorite guys!

I appreciate you so much and I want to thank you so much for sharing with us.

You always come with something interesting and giving us something to think about.

So I appreciate you so much.

What I'm going to do is, Angie, we're getting ready to close out.

You wanted to say something?

I see your hand up.

I don't know, maybe she ‑‑ Angie?

>> Angie Fuoco: You can just forget it, Yvette.

I'll ask you later, sorry.

>> Yvette Gibson: Okay, no worries.

I wanted to ask everyone to please, please, please, take a moment to take the follow‑ up survey, so that we can continue to do, bring great people to you.

We want to hear from you.

This is about you, not about me, so we want to continue to bring forth great people, and I am going to bring Miss Bri back, my sidekick.

She has something she would like to share, so Bri, it's on you.

>> Bri Canty: Thanks, Yvette.

This is Bri again.

Thank you all for voting in our accessible superhero contest.

It was very close out our accessibility superhero for 2022 is Captain CAPPtions, so congratulations, and thank you both for entering the contest.

Both of our superheroes can reach out to Yvette with your personal email to receive your prizes and if possible reach out to her today before she goes on leave.

Thank you everyone for attending today's community meeting.

Congratulations, Angie.

Please take a moment to fill out the survey in the chat.

We appreciate your feedback and thanks again for joining and have a great day.

>> Yvette Gibson: Yes, so don't forget, Angie, and Paula, please send me your personal emails to get your prizes.

Thank you so much.

You guys have a wonderful holiday season, whatever you choose to do to celebrate, enjoy.

Thank you for attending.

>> Brandon Jubar: Thanks, Yvette, bye‑ bye.

>> Yvette Gibson: You're so welcome.

And all of those attending the DEIA Summit, you still have an hour and 15 minutes to attend.

[Event concluded]