

Corrie Melanson 0:00

Welcome to Accessibility Ally. It's a podcast featuring guests with a range of disabilities and social identities. They share provocative ideas and challenge allies to disrupt ableism, and I'm your host Corrie Melanson. Thanks for tuning in. On this episode of Accessibility Ally, we speak with two accessibility confident leaders. Henk, and Thivjan are both executive directors of organizations that support people with intellectual disabilities. Henk is the Director of DASC - Dartmouth Adult Services Center, which is a social enterprise, and Thivjan is the Executive Director of Inclusion Nova Scotia where people with intellectual disabilities families and allies lead the way to build a just an inclusive society. They provide great insight into what it means to be an accessibility ally.

Welcome to today's podcast. My name is Corrie Melanson. I am joined today by Thivjan Tharmaratnam and Henk van Leewen. And both are accessibility confident leaders in their own organizations. So Henk, really great to have you here today. Could you please introduce yourself, any social identities you'd like to share and anything personally, or professionally that kind of connects you to this work?

Henk van Leeuwen 1:28

So I am Henk van Leewen and I am a parent and a nonprofit leader, and an ally, I suppose for persons with disabilities. I'm a parent of two adult children who are autistic. And I serve and support nearly 200 individuals with intellectual disabilities each year where I work. So I work at DASC, which stands for Dartmouth Adult Services Center. We've been around for nearly 60 years, primarily supporting persons with intellectual disabilities in the Dartmouth area, and Dartmouth greater Dartmouth region. And so we have a range of employment, Community Employment Training, life skills, social skills, recreation and leisure, active lifestyles, youth and individual support programs.

Corrie Melanson 2:26

And my understanding, too, is DASC, the first kind of disability focused organization that you've worked at.

Henk van Leeuwen 2:37

Actually my second, okay, so it's, it's a bit of a path, but I'm going to share it with you because you're nodding enthusiastically. So my first kind of career was in broadcast journalism. So I worked for the CBC for a number of years, in different cities across the country. And I was drawn to working in and supporting my community through service. I'm a volunteer, I'm a member of rotary for a long time. And so I had an opportunity to get involved in the Disability Support sector. I applied for, and was then hired to be CEO of Easterseals, Nova Scotia, in 2013. So that was my first experience in supporting an

organization that helped persons with disabilities. So I worked there very happily for four years. And then I took a position with another nonprofit organization in the greater Halifax area that was not in disability support, it was serving vulnerable children and youth, and love that organization also. But I realize sometimes this happens to you, you don't understand what you've left until you're gone. And so when I heard that they were recruiting for a new leader at DASC, I was like, "I'm in I would like to go for that." And so that's how I found my way back to disability support because at both Easterseals and DASC, one of the things I love about it is I work very closely and intimately with the people that we serve in the same building where I work. And so people will come to my office and they want to share with me what's going on in their life, or they made this much money this week, or they want all these medals of Special Olympics and they want to chat with me and they want to share what's going on in their in their life with me. And it's just amazing! I just love that connection. It's it's something I'm truly grateful for.

Corrie Melanson 4:38

And so at the beginning you mentioned you don't have a disability and you see yourself as an accessibility or disability ally. This podcast is called Accessibility Ally. We've certainly interrogated a little bit around what does that mean to them? So I'm just curious for you, because you've named yourself as someone without a disability, but what does it mean to you to be a leader in this sector and to be an ally?

Henk van Leeuwen 5:06

To be present, to listen, to hold space. So again, I work at a place where we're helping dozens of persons with intellectual disabilities every day with their their goals, or their aspirations, or their daily objectives, work or otherwise. And it's actually just being in the room with them, and listening and including them. And so, if we embark on some kind of strategic activity or plan for the organization, or a program we want to design, it's making sure that their voices are included in that so they can, also be architects of that design, or they can also influence the outcome, or delivery of a program. I'm not quite sure organizations like ours, we're always very good at that. And so maybe someone listening to this, who works in the sector isn't going to like what I'm going to say right now. But it's, in my opinion, the way we supported or created space for persons with disabilities are probably paternalistic and a little patriarchal, and it's just outdated. And so now we have to ensure that first voices are permitted to truly be themselves in the organizations that they participate in every day; that they're empowered to choose. We used to operate in a way where when someone came to DASC every day, we would say to them, "this is the activity that you're doing." So now, were prescribing this strange and curious notion of choice, right, which is kind of a in a way newfound concept to day-programs like ours, and there are about 35 to 40 of us across Nova Scotia. Senior leadership at DASC hosted a town hall, for parents and caregivers, about some

changes that we were undertaking at DASC over the past year, and we wanted to let people know what what we were doing and why. And introducing to them sort of the core pillars or foundational platforms of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Remedy. And so when they heard that we were offering choice to their son, or their daughter or sibling who was in our program, some of them didn't quite understand it. Because decades ago, in some cases, decades ago, they fought so hard, they advocated so hard to find a program like DASC for their child to go to. And by golly, they were going to go into that program, and they were going to work. And they were going to work seven hours a day and produce, you know, Product X for business, why? And that was going to be who they were. But now we're saying, 'what if they don't want to work?' Now we're saying, 'What if they want to do a different kind of activity or program that day.' We had this drum fit exercise where they pound physio balls with drums and to music, or maybe they want to participate in yoga, maybe they want to do arts and crafts, maybe they want to learn about advocacy, maybe they want to be educated in something or do something that's not work. But but their families, not all of them but some of them, were really wrestling and struggling with this. 'What do you mean, choice?' They're supposed to go to their desk every day and work? By golly!

Corrie Melanson 8:50

Right? Yeah, that work ethic in there.

Henk van Leeuwen 8:53

Like as if we could only possibly be useful if we're being "PRODUCTIVE." But I understand where they're coming from, too. I'm being somewhat cheeky here. Because I could completely get where they were coming from about it, where the Disability Support Sector is being flipped upside down and turned on its head. And so culturally and philosophically, in my opinion, there's educating that has to happen. And, you know, sometimes that includes family members of persons with disabilities.

Corrie Melanson 9:30

And is it being flipped on its head because of the Human Rights Remedy?

Henk van Leeuwen 9:34

Largely, yes, I believe that it is. Yeah. And, you know, it's the Province of Nova Scotia, in my opinion who is trying to undo decades of systems and institutions. and it's, you know, this remedy is now saying, Well, you know what, it doesn't matter who you are if you're someone with a disability, you have the right to choose where and how you live, and what community you live in, and whether you work and how you play and how you recreate, and there's got to be programs to support your choice and to support your ability. And that's colossal, that is like we're trying to do a micro version of the remedy in

a way at DASC over the past year. And it's the most profound change our organization has undergone in its 60 year history; nothing comes even close, even moving to a brand new building in Burnside 10 years ago. Bigger than!

Corrie Melanson 10:40

Because this is about workplace culture versus that physical built environment, and about how you're inviting people to be a part of that work or that workplace culture. And maybe it's not a workplace culture, if they're choosing not to work, sometimes.

Henk van Leeuwen 11:00

It is, yeah, but only if they want it to be.

Corrie Melanson 11:03

And I think about all of the changes, even since COVID. Changes with flexibility, and choice, and options. Not every workspace has those but, the idea is one that can extend to workplaces, where it's majority or dominant people with disabilities. Like, that's so important. And again, when we think about accessibility legislation in Nova Scotia being framed in human rights, when you come down to the fundamentals of human rights, it really needs to be about choice and autonomy and support, and that all needs to be part of the picture.

Henk van Leeuwen 11:45

Absolutely. 100%!

Corrie Melanson 11:47

Thivjan, can you introduce yourself and share any social identities that you feel comfortable sharing?

Thivjan 11:54

My name is Thivjan Tharmaratnam. I go by him, and I am a Tamil Canadian.

Corrie Melanson 12:01

Wonderful, and where do you work?

Thivjan 12:04

Yeah, so I am the Executive Director for Inclusion, Nova Scotia, and we are a human rights, provincial nonprofit. Our focus is really having a 'person directed' approach. And we're committed to supporting individuals and their families with living and inclusive life and community. And we do that by supporting them navigate systems advocating and finding solutions to some of the concerns that they may come across.

Corrie Melanson 12:33

So you support individuals, but you also support their families?

Thivjan 12:37

Yeah, our bulk of the work is around supporting the individual and their families, because we've always found that families have been the first advocates so they are the leaders for advancing inclusion. And when we talk about successfully, being able to build life and community, it's those families who have had the ability to do that, and have really advanced some of these policies and changes to be able to do that.

Corrie Melanson 13:00

Just for our listeners to kind of understand, what's an example of someone you might support? And then the kinds of things you might do to support their family as well?

Thivjan 13:10

Yeah, um, a lot of the work that we do is really around looking at how we change the systems and cultures that exist currently. So when it comes to segregated education or segregated employment, how do we move that needle forward? So when it comes to supporting the individual and their families, it's really about helping them to plan and envision what a life could be, and could mean to live in community. And then, what are the things that they would need to do both in the short term, and long term to be able to achieve that. So we have a couple of different ways that we do that. But really, it's about building that relationship with the family, and then providing examples from provincially, internationally, nationally, of some of the successes, and some of the ways that we can do that, and then help them to create the step by step process.

Corrie Melanson 14:00

I really love that you're focused on the systems, right? And the culture, because that's really what we're talking about in this podcast. How can workplaces in particular, be more accessible? And so now what we know is that the barriers are in the environment, right? They're not with the person or the individual. The barriers are in the environment and workplace is an environment that we spend a lot of time in. And so I'm curious, how did you get started in this kind of work?

Thivjan 14:33

Yeah, I kind of took an interesting path because I was born in Sri Lanka, and I grew up there and then immigrated here when I was six years old, and then grew up in a very small white town in rural Ontario. But the nice thing is I came with a unique lens - where even though I had faced levels of instances of discrimination, overall, I had a very

inclusive life. If I felt like I belonged, I had great friends. I grew up in a community where people knew me, people were connected to me, and then went to university and all that stuff. And I really didn't have a connection to the sector until one of my first jobs at a university, was for Community Living Ontario. So it is essentially a federated member of Inclusion Canada as well. And that job really opened the door to both segregation and isolation, and some of the things that I saw, but then also some of the ways in which communities could be built for individuals with disability. And I'd always come from a human rights perspective, you know. Everyone deserves the opportunities and abilities to feel a sense of connection, to feel belonging, and to have all the qualities of community. So yeah, it was really that job that opened my eyes and had a really big impact in my career trajectory. And then I went on to do some stuff in community development and economic development. And how I ended up in this job was actually my previous boss, who had worked for Community Living Ontario, had reached out and said, Inclusion Nova Scotia is going in this direction, they really want someone who can lead this organization through a human rights approach. And really, in Nova Scotia it is really poised to have a significant impact for the lives of individual disability, with the Human Rights Remedy. And so it seemed like a great opportunity and they encouraged me to apply. And that's how I ended up here!

And you came to Nova Scotia as well before?

I was already here. I was working for the town in New Glasgow.

Corrie Melanson 16:40

Right. Okay. Yeah. So what's great, as we've talked about the Human Rights Remedy with Vicky Levack, in another episode, and of course, we've also connected with Don Stegan and Terri Lynn Almeda, from the Accessibility Directorate, talking about what Nova Scotia is doing in terms of our accessibility standards, the legislation and really how that will be rolled out in Nova Scotia by 2030. And of course, beyond that I'm really curious. Vicki Levack is an individual human rights activist, and she talked about the human rights remedy from her perspective; as someone who's a leader of disability and accessibility focused organization, how do you describe the Human Rights Remedy? And what is the impact that it has on your work?

Thivjan 17:34

I think the big thing with the remedy is, it's essentially a monumental statement. And it really puts the focus on Nova Scotia, and specifically the Nova Scotia government and some of the services and the providers that we have to be able to transform what they're doing kind of change the culture and really create inclusive communities. And the thing with with the remedy is, it's a legally binding document, right? This is the first

time ever we had something that we can go back to and say, You are held accountable to this, we have agreed to this as a province, although there's going to be some hiccup points, and there's going to be some messiness. I see it as hope. And I see it as for a lot of families that we speak to, it is that hope that comes with the remedy. And that hope for the culture change that hope for the transformation and services. And that is going to help them essentially, implement and vision life and community for their loved ones. As

Corrie Melanson 18:37

we know, two and five people in Nova Scotia have disabilities. And those are, you know, the range of physical intellectual, but also invisible. So even like in the work that you're doing, are you seeing that arise in numbers knowing that, like, the percentage in Nova Scotia is going up even from a few years ago, and we're seeing, you know, that's with seniors, that's with young people, that's probably all of us know, someone with a disability or are connected in some way? And it seems to me like this is everyone's business, because this is 40% of Nova Scotians. At this point, so I don't know. Yeah, what is Have you seen an impact and just the numbers or uptick or, you know, impact of the work that you're doing?

Thivjan 19:22

Yeah, I mean, I'd say it's two things. I think there is an uptick. I mean, the Stats Can numbers show that there is an increase. But once again, I think when we go back to that previous question around the remedy, it is that because it's not just about specifically supporting individuals with disability, with deinstitutionalization, there's a whole bigger picture that comes out of this. It's around eliminating segregation, and eliminating silos, and eliminating like congregated settings as a whole. So whether it's mental health or, whether it's equity deserving groups, this is going to be when implemented correctly, and over the course of time, a huge transformation in what this province is, and I think that's gonna have a great impact for every Nova Scotian.

Corrie Melanson 20:05

Absolutely. You told me earlier that you have a three year old. And so I'm curious, how do you describe what you do to your daughter?

Thivjan 20:15

How do I describe it to my daughter? She never asked, she knows I go to work. And she knows that I work in front of a computer and meet with people. But going back to that question around what brought me to this work, I would say that was a pivotal factor as well. When we talk about how babies enter the world, we all enter the same way, we all come out of the hospital or out into the world, the exact same way. And then often we're some people are put into special boxes, special programs, special pathways, and

that ends up increasing and increasing, and further segregation and then becoming siloed. And I know from just my past experience growing up, and where Ontario was a little bit more advanced, especially a small town in Ontario with respect to inclusive education, because some of it, we just didn't have the resources to create segregation. Other parts of it was it was a small community. So you felt that closeness. And that's how I want my kids to grow up. And that's how I would like them to live; in a world where they are engaging and interacting and playing with everyone else. So I don't know if I've ever been asked that question. I'm sure she'll ask that question as she grows up. But I would say, one of the reasons why I'm so passionate about this field, and why I'm here is because of my kids. I want them to experience all the same level of inclusion that I have, and I hope that every kid can experience that.

Corrie Melanson 21:49

And what's interesting about being a parent, while my kids are quite a bit older than yours, and my kids are adopted. So but whether adopted or biological, you really don't know who this person will be. Maybe what kinds of barriers they might face, because even if they don't have those physical challenges or disabilities, like whether it's mental health, or whether it's being neurodiverse, or in other ways, like you. And that comes, throughout time, so it is very interesting to be a parent, certainly of kids who are maybe neurotypical or able bodied. But also, I have two kids, one who faces learning challenges, and one who is neurodiverse. And it's really fascinating, just to be a parent; fascinating, challenging all the things. You know, you're learning all the time, and you just can't make assumptions about that.

Thivjan 22:46

Yeah, and I think that's exactly one of the beauties of this work is that, you're trying to create an inclusive community so that your kids grow up and live in place where they feel a sense of belonging, and so does everyone else, right?

Corrie Melanson 23:01

What does it mean to you to be an accessibility confident leader, Henk?

Henk van Leeuwen 23:06

I think being an accessibility confident leader means holding space for individuals who have different abilities, aspirations, and perhaps most importantly, listening to and including first voices. I don't know anything about supporting persons with disabilities, and I'm saying that somewhat facetiously. But I really don't because I don't have a disability. So it's important for me in the organization where I work in in the community, to hold space for listen to get the perspective of include the perspective of individuals with different abilities and different aspirations.

Corrie Melanson 23:51

So I'm curious like, what what does that look and feel like tangibly? What does that look like in your day to day work?

Henk van Leeuwen 24:00

So each day, I support and serve and work with as many as 80 individuals with disabilities. And everyone has different choices. Everyone has different perspectives. Everyone has different skills. And each individual holds different kinds of abilities and works at a different pace, or simply works differently than the person who might be beside them. I always try to tell people who are curious about, or wondering, what's involved in hiring someone with a disability or including someone with a disability. It's making sure you meet every individual at their level, because it's not going to be all people need this or everyone who wants everyone who is autistic needs this support, or everyone who uses a wheelchair needs it. You absolutely don't know, unless you meet the individual and accommodate the individual as opposed to trying to accommodate what your mental model is for persons with disabilities.

Corrie Melanson 25:14

And we've talked a lot about accommodations in the podcast. And so I think you bring up that really good point that accommodations are very individual. Even people with the same disabilities might need different accommodations. And sometimes the same accommodations work for people with very different disabilities. Right? So holding space, like what I hear in that is that you're asking and then listening.

Henk van Leeuwen 25:38

You're soliciting and you're seeking. And you're including, and so I hold some perspective on this from both a professional and a personal level. Yeah, so our daughter who is autistic and went through the school system, the school system was obsessed with making sure that they were included in the classroom, the school system was obsessed with ensuring that they were included in the exact same activities as everybody else. That might work for some people, for our daughter that is the exact opposite of what they needed and what they wanted. They needed quiet space, they needed to write an exam out in the hallway if they needed to. They didn't necessarily want to be included in all the group activities and functions. And so it was an education, primarily for my wife who took the lead on this. It was an education and educating the educators on what individual accommodation actually is.

Corrie Melanson 26:39

So then Thivjan I'm curious, from your perspective, what does it mean to be an accessibility confident leader?

Thivjan 26:46

I think I'll echo what Henk was saying. The first step is really around understanding some of the nuances and some of the barriers that might be, that the system might have. I think I'd take it a step further and almost reframe the question to also say, what does it look to be an inclusive leader? Because I think when you I think it's just as important to understand the barriers that might prevent someone from accessing a service, an employment opportunity, recreational opportunity, whatever it might be, I think when you kind of take it to that next level, it's around how do you create a sense of belonging, a culture, a community that actually enables that individual to come in and feel like they have complete and full participation in whatever they're doing? So I think that's what I would say is, if you want to be an accessible, excessively confident leader goal, go a step further, and get beyond accessible and become inclusive, and then look at learning. And just as Henk said, you know, make sure that you are taking the individual approach, and you're taking the time to connect with the people to understand and learn about the barriers that might prevent the access, but then also have the crucial conversations with your workforce around how do we create a sense of belonging within this workplace?

Corrie Melanson 28:13

Yeah, I love that. Henk, your focus is more like, listen and create the space and let's focus on the individual and Thivjan, you're kind of broadening that to like really thinking about workplace culture, and the kind of environment that folks are working in. So both of you, though, work every day with people with disabilities, this is kind of like in the nature of what you do. So when we think about employers of their workplaces, like people who are leading other organizations, whether they're business leaders or, nonprofit leaders or in the public sector, like what advice do you have for them in terms of being an inclusive, confident leader or an accessibility confident leader?

Henk van Leeuwen 29:00

One piece of advice that I have is, is obviously, yes, persons with disabilities, individuals with disabilities should be included in the workforce because it's the right thing to do. And we should be promoting equity in the truest sense. But if you're a business or a company the other bit of advice I would have for you is hire someone with a disability that's going to help your bottom line. At the end of the day, if you're trying to make money for you by whatever, selling your product or promoting a service for people in the community, hiring persons with disabilities is good for your bottom line because there are numerous studies that reference that persons with disabilities have lower rates of

absenteeism from work, they are 100% committed to the job once they're included, once the rent is like okay, they perform this task for you really, really well, they're going to work incredibly hard. And they're committed to the organization that's included them. There are also studies that bear that out. And you're going to have fewer challenges with retention, which costs you money as a business. Yeah. So from a from a brutal economic standpoint, if I may, it's good. It's good for your business.

Corrie Melanson 30:30

And we actually got a chance to chat with 2 Crows Operations Manager and the two folks that they hired from Prescott Group, but who both have intellectual disabilities, and I would say that absolutely came out in their interview, they are so loyal, and so excited to be working there. And you know, one of them is the fastest box maker, right? So they're on a production line and assembly line making boxes, and he's the fastest box maker and the other person that was on, can tell from a ways away if there's a defect in a bottle or something. So these strengths that they bring in terms of their own kind of personality strengths, and that's what they're bringing to the workplace.

Henk van Leeuwen 31:14

Yeah, and this bears out because we have job coaches, where I work who quote and support, like Prescott. So DASC supports persons with intellectual disabilities, and community employers. They do give us you know, that these examples where they're incredibly loyal, they're incredibly committed to the brand. And, there's some local businesses that are consistent, and hiring persons with disabilities, you know, Sobeys, Tim Hortons, Home Hardware, these are a few that we work with regularly.

Corrie Melanson 31:46

Yeah, great. So it's really nice to hear about those kind of champions out in the community. Thivjan, what would you add to that, in terms of advice to people who like this?

Thivjan 31:55

I mean, I would echo exactly what Henk said again. I think the competitive advantage that you have in hiring, and supporting individuals with disabilities get employment with your workforce, like the stats are there, we know it, I mean, the labor market that we have right now, any sort of advantage you can have is wonderful. And I think the other thing is, it's really around being intentional, right? And so if you are an employer that's looking at this, making sure that you're not just looking at, okay, I'm gonna go and hire someone with a disability. Are you looking at what your job posting process right now? What's your recruitment process? What's your marketing process? What's your hiring and onboarding process? Because when you actually evaluate those things, you may

learn that someone who is a candidate who could do the job and do that job very well might be facing a lot of barriers and being able to walk through the door to obtain that job. And so I think having those conversations, whether from with first voice, person, individuals with disabilities, with families with job support agencies like DASC, and to be able to have those conversations, the way that you're going to be able to educate yourself, and then really be crucial in how you go through the process. And that's what's going to end once again, I go back to like, having that just as important to get people through the door is around that culture shift within your workplace. Right? So are you willing to have those conversations with your staff, with your senior leadership around ensuring this is why we're doing this, and this is the economic value of it. And he kind of talked about the business return. But there's also a huge return on society and community as well, right? So beyond a paycheck, when you hire inclusively, there's a lot of value towards that individual, which resonates that family. And so when it comes to like self esteem, when it comes to all those things that we every single one of us feels when we have a job, that's going to resonate within the community as well. So

Corrie Melanson 33:55

Yeah, so what gives you hope for an accessible future?

Thivjan 33:59

What gives me hope? I think one of the reasons I took this job was, I think, Nova Scotia, with the Remedy and with the things that's happening, there is a lot of hope that comes along with that, because like I mentioned, it is a binding agreement that's going to help kind of push some of the employers, push communities, push service providers to create more inclusive delivery of service per end programming. I'm fortunate that I have a really strong board. And we work with a lot of families who have advocated for years or where they're advocating right now for months, and seeing small wins. And so it's those small wins, whether it's around education, whether it's around employment, whether it's around recreation, where they've been able to support their loved one, to be able to build a life and community. That's kind of what's provided me open house. People like Barb Horner is someone you might want to get on your podcast in the future. I'll plug her name but she's advocated in Dartmouth for years to have ensured her daughter has an inclusive life and community and just hearing her stories, hearing her 'aha' moments, hearing how she's done this for so long, and she's continues to do it. And she's seen the small wins, and she's seen what it can look like. I think those are the things that provide me hope going forward.

Corrie Melanson 35:28

Yeah. What about you, Henk, what gives you hope?

Henk van Leeuwen 35:30

They're very in a similar vein, I would say deadlines give me hope. So the the Human Rights Remedy. The province has five years to sort this out. Which if you're the Disability Rights Coalition, you're probably thinking this should have happened yesterday. But for the government of Nova Scotia, I mean, five years, it's not really a big chunk of time. Like they have to move on this and they are, and it is moving. So that gives me hope. Nova Scotia, again with a deadline, Nova Scotia has to be an accessible province or a barrier free province, in every sense by the year 2030. You know, that's on the horizon. And then you have the Premier of this provincial government who has apologized to persons with disabilities for decades of systemic discrimination. That's a statement. Yeah, you know, when a leader does that, that that gives me hope. And I think where I work, and my colleagues, where I see our staff, our team, empowering our participants with disabilities with choice, I couldn't sit here confidently and tell you that DASC has always had a culture where persons with disabilities walked into our doors, and every day and we said, what would you like to do today? I'd say for decades, it was probably, this is what you're doing today. And listen, no one's set up social enterprises like DASC or Prescott 60 years ago with the notion of, 'we're going to deprive persons with disabilities have choice.' But it all came from the good space and good heart and good intention in building spaces, like these social enterprises where persons with disabilities could be included. But the way they were set up, and in my opinion, until quite recently was welcome to our program today, this is what we're doing. Whereas now we flipped it on our head in the spirit of the Human Rights Remedy, in the spirit of choice, in the spirit of empowerment, and true inclusion. Welcome to DASC this morning, what would you like to do today? Would you like to work? Okay, then we're going to pay you if you're working. Otherwise, we have these programs. And by the way, we're going to ask you for your opinion, on how to design and inform and lead these programs, these non-employment programs. So these are fundamental shifts that even inclusive agencies like ours had to make and should be making.

Corrie Melanson 38:05

So really living out the 'Nothing about us without us,' right? So in the design and the development and the delivery of programs supports and and as you say, social enterprises and other other kinds of economic ways of you know, earning an income.

Henk van Leeuwen 38:21

And designing a culture where people can be advocates right for themselves. And where people feel safe to advocate for themselves. And, you know, where operations like ours are going to listen to that.

Corrie Melanson 38:35

Well, Thivjan, and Henk, thanks so much for coming in today. Really appreciate your perspectives. And thanks so much for being accessibility confident leaders.

It's been a pleasure. It's been fun. Thanks!

Okay. Thanks for tuning in. You can learn more at our website, seachangeolab.com.