# Disability Deep Dive Episode 101: Bridging the Gap: Charles Redding on Global Solutions for Assistive Technology

**Jodi Beckstine** (00:09):

What does it take to move beyond charity and actually change systems? How do you make sure people around the world can access assistive technology that fits, lasts, and truly supports their lives? And what happens when innovation meets global responsibility? That's the conversation behind Bridging the Gap: Charles Redding on Global Solutions for Assistive Technology, and it's coming up on Disability Deep Dive.

**Keith Casebonne** (00:36):

Welcome to Disability Deep Dive. I'm Keith.

**Jodi Beckstine** (00:39):

And I'm Jodi. Today's episode takes us beyond borders and into a conversation about systems, sustainability, and what real access looks like on the global scale.

**Keith Casebonne** (00:48):

Our guest is Charles Redding, Executive Director of Wheels for Humanity, and the leader of the Center for Logistics and Supply of Assistive Products, known as CLASP, a social enterprise focused on transforming how assistive technology reaches people in less resourced communities around the world.

**Jodi Beckstine** (01:06):

Instead of relying on one-time donations, CLASP is building sustainable supply chains that connect manufacturers, rehabilitation centers, hospitals, and humanitarian responders with the right products at the right time.

**Keith Casebonne** (01:18):

In this conversation, we talk about what it means to shift systems, how CLASP operates in crisis and conflict settings, and why access to assistive technology is a global issue that deserves far more attention than it gets.

**Jodi Beckstine** (01:31):

So let's get into it. Here's our conversation with Charles Redding.

(01:36):

Hello, Mr. Redding. Welcome to Disability Deep Dive. To start, can you introduce yourself to our listeners and share a little bit about your role at Wheels for Humanity and CLASP?

**Charles Redding** (01:46):

Sure. And thank you for having me here. My name is Charles Redding, and I'm the executive director for Momentum Wheels for Humanity. We're a nonprofit organization. We're actually headquartered in the Los Angeles area, but we have offices in Ukraine, El Salvador. We've shipped our assistive technology products now to over 70 different countries.

(02:05):

Our mission is to promote greater inclusion for people with disabilities. And we do that primarily through mobility, therapy, advocacy, and empowerment. And we've aligned our work in the really three focus areas. The first one is strengthening rehabilitation and assistive technology services. And there, we're really supporting the development of rehabilitation services within the health system. And unfortunately, in most countries, it's not a part of the health system. The second area, assistive technology supplier provision, and that's where our social enterprise class come in, and which I know we'll talk about a little bit later. But there we're increasing global access to what we consider to be high quality, affordable civic products. And again, unfortunately, that's not always the case or we're really focused there.

(02:48):

And our third and final area is what we call inclusive disaster response. And we're working to bolster resilience of people with disabilities before, during, and after disaster. And unfortunately, during the time of disaster, a lot of times people with disabilities [inaudible 00:03:04], and so we want to make sure we focus on the needs of those individuals during the time of disaster.

**Keith Casebonne** (03:13):

Well, that's amazing. It's a wonderful organization. Really admire everything that you guys are doing. But you mentioned CLASP and said... Yeah, so we're going to dig into that a little bit deeper here. So for those who may not be familiar with it, what is CLASP and how does

it address the global challenge of getting high quality, appropriate assistive technology to the people that need it the most?

**Charles Redding** (03:39):

Sure. So first of all, CLASP is an acronym. People love acronyms. And what it stands for is Consolidating Logistics for Assistive Technology for Supplier Provision. So implied in there is a lot of... It's a mechanism.

**Keith Casebonne** (03:54):

It's a mouthful too.

**Charles Redding** (03:54):

It's a mouthful, which is why we say CLASP. And we actually launched CLASP 10 years. We're celebrating 10 years now.

**Keith Casebonne** (04:00):

Oh.

**Charles Redding** (04:01):

And at the time, it was a very groundbreaking initiative that aimed to improve access to a diverse range of high quality, affordable wheelchairs and low and middle income countries. Now since then, we've expanded it to include a number of AT products and mobility aids, and it's a hub. And so we've developed a hub or warehouse that's located in Shanghai, China. And there we're stocking a variety of adult and pediatric wheelchairs, posterior products, walking aides, cushions, park kits, you name it. And we're really providing a service to a lot of the manufacturers of AT. So we come in and provide that logistic support, that distribution, a lot of the marketing, a lot of the networking within that industry for them so they don't have to do it.

**Jodi Beckstine** (04:47):

Wow. That such a clear picture of the solutions that CLASP offers. Wheels for Humanity and CLASP have spoken about the limitations of one-off donations of mobility devices. What are some of the common issues with that model and how does CLASP approach create long-term sustainable change?

**Charles Redding** (05:13):

Sure. Yeah. I mean, as I mentioned, CLASP offers a diverse range of these products. We make sure they're affordable and they're profitably extended. Unfortunately, there's a number of key barriers to access for AT, particularly low and middle income countries. Number one is unreliably supplied. So to your point, many governments in low and middle countries rely on donations. And I'm sure these donations have good intentions, but there are unintended consequences as well. They can often lead to inconsistent supply in appropriate products and inefficient distribution, and unfortunately, inequitable access. So those are all of our goods. So CLASP, we work to address that. The second is cost. These products aren't cheap.

**Keith Casebonne** (05:53):

Sure.

**Charles Redding** (05:53):

High costs, limited choices. So available products are often either prohibitively expensive or low quality that can't be safely adapted to the user. So we make sure our products are high quality, they're appropriate for the community in which we're serving, and we provide a service in terms of making sure they're properly fitted. So a wheelchair is not one size fit all. We make sure we go in and provide that.

(06:19):

And the third one, which we find quite a bit, is just the lack of training providers. Unfortunately, healthcare providers are not wallet trained on proper wheelchair provision and have limited exposure to a range of products that meet the different needs of the user. So even if they knew what to provide, they don't have access to it. So these are really three. So we talk about unreliable supply, high cost, lack of training [inaudible 00:06:43] class, this is where we come in, this is where we see we can come in and provide that service to make sure we're offering a diverse range of these products that they can choose from. We become a one-stop shop for them, if you will, in which they can order a 40-foot container full of assistive technology and the diversity that they need, and making sure it's properly fitted and adapted to that community, which we're trying to share.

**Jodi Beckstine** (07:08):

Wow.

**Keith Casebonne** (07:10):

It's incredible. It sounds like you're taking a logistics nightmare for the most part and figuring out how to make it work. And so CLASP is operating as a bridge, I guess, between manufacturers and those service providers. Can you walk us through how that supply chain works in practice? And you've already hinted at this, but why it's really such a game changer for global AT access.

**Charles Redding** (07:38):

No, sure. I mean, when we talk about supply chain, we often talk about planning, sourcing, raking, and delivery or distributing products. And so those are all elements that have to be considered within supply chain. And unfortunately, a lot of the small manufacturers, they can't handle that entire piece. So as I mentioned, back in 2015 or roughly 10 years ago, we established this AT Hub in Shanghai, free trade zone. And the reason we put it there, it's a central location for international shipping, and it's also in close proximity to the product manufacturer. So you can see we have a hub that we brought the manufacturing together with the shipping and distribution to provide that service. And so this hub provides a solution to many of those supply side challenges that I talk about that are faced by the wheelchair service providers. And what would considered to be last resource [inaudible 00:08:28], such as limited product variety. It could be excessive lead time, and it could be other logistical burdens in which they're just not capable of managing. So we provide that for them.

(08:41):

And most often with manufacturers, they may provide one, maybe two product types, while the need in the community is much more diverse, other than that. So what they really need is an array of these type of products to choose from. So we've developed this relationship with a number of these AT manufacturers that can address the variety of the needs. So we have direct relationship with them and we're able to procure our products directly from them and put it in the warehouse and work on a more wholistic approach to providing these to communities that need it. So this mechanism that we provide, we can procure and warehouse all of these products. We can also provide provisioning. Whether that mean we can go out and provide the service to make sure they're properly fitted.

(09:26):

And then lastly, we can distribute the products. We have also a relationship with a lot of the shippers, freight quarters that we coordinate with. So for manufacturer, all they need to do is say, "Hey, CLASP, here are my products." We procure those products and then we take it from there and report back. So it's really a win-win proposition, both for the

manufacturers, for the recipients of the products, and also for us in terms of providing that service.

**Keith Casebonne** (09:53):

Wow.

**Jodi Beckstine** (09:54):

Wow. That's a fascinating look behind the scenes of that.

**Keith Casebonne** (10:02):

It really is.

**Charles Redding** (10:03):

I'll probably go too detailed into supply chain.

**Jodi Beckstine** (10:03):

No.

**Charles Redding** (10:03):

I'm an old supply chain person, but it really can be complicated and daunting-

**Keith Casebonne** (10:06):

Oh, I bet.

**Jodi Beckstine** (10:10):

Yeah.

**Charles Redding** (10:10):

... for a manufacturer to have to navigate that field.

**Keith Casebonne** (10:10):

Yeah. And after taking-

**Jodi Beckstine** (10:10):

fantastic.

**Keith Casebonne** (10:12):

... alot of time to build it to where it is today, it didn't happen overnight.

**Jodi Beckstine** (10:14):

Yeah.

**Charles Redding** (10:14):

Sure.

**Keith Casebonne** (10:14):

Yeah.

**Jodi Beckstine** (10:17):

So CLASP has provided support in places like Myanmar and Gaza. What are the unique challenges that come with delivering assistive technology to humanitarian or crisis settings? And how does CLASP adapt to meet those needs?

**Charles Redding** (10:34):

Yeah, I hinted at this before. One of our pillars is the inclusive disaster relief. And all too often during the time of crisis, people with disabilities are not considered. So the time we deliver products to address their needs is paramount. It can really mean the difference between life and death, unfortunately. And so, one of our focus is that inclusive disaster. And again, what we're doing there, we've established partnerships with UN Ops AT Scale, World Health Organization where we've developed kits. So we actually are prepositioning kits of AT products, and there's some incontinence products there as well, but to address the needs of people with disabilities during this process.

(11:17):

So you can imagine, we've got warehouse now, we've got these kits which list all the items that are typically needed from wheelchairs, mobility aids, walkers, pushers, you name it, incontinence items. And so they're sitting there ready to go. And so when we get the alert that there's been a disaster at the Myanmar, like in Gaza, that there's a need for these products. We can quickly ship and make sure those progress would get there and they're appropriate for that community, again, that is often left out. So it just allows us to respond quickly in a more thoughtful and more targeted way on time in crisis.

**Jodi Beckstine** (11:54):

Wow.

**Keith Casebonne** (11:55):

Wow. Are there challenges as far as getting things past like checkpoints, military issues, things like that? I mean, what barriers do you face?

**Charles Redding** (12:06):

Yeah, these are usual in regard to war zones or disaster zones, which is very difficult. So a lot of our issues are really around logistics again. Sometimes it's just if the airport is port of entry, how do we get the products in? A lot of times they're airship, but if we have to [inaudible 00:12:27], we may have to ship them in via sea. So the mode of transportation becomes a critical element for us. And then there's, in the case of Gaza, we actually had the warehouse, which was destroyed where they were going to store the product. So just proper storage of the components once they get there and then on the ground distribution. So what we do is we typically are working with another agency like UNICEF or some others that may have underground people. So we deliver the products to them and then they're able to distribute the products on the ground. So that's how we navigate those challenges.

**Keith Casebonne** (13:05):

Oh, okay.

**Jodi Beckstine** (13:05):

Wow.

**Keith Casebonne** (13:06):

That makes a lot of sense. Wow. Amazing. Well, beyond delivering products, Wheels for Humanity and CLASP are part of a larger push for systemic change in rehabilitation and assistive technology access. What role do you see policy advocacy and local capacity building playing into that vision?

**Charles Redding** (13:32):

Yeah, I really believe policy advocacy and local capacity building. They're all critical to strengthen an overall health system to make sure long-term sustainability. You may be aware, as many 70 million people around the world need a wheelchair for mobility, but don't have access. That makes no sense to me. And globally, it means 2.4 billion people or one in four have conditions that could benefit for some form of physical rehabilitation. And that need for rehabilitation is only going to grow. It's largely unmet.

(14:06):

In some low middle income countries, more than 50% of the people don't have access to rehabilitation services. So again, that global need is expected to continue to rise. We've got all the conflicts, we've got wars, we've got all other things that are happening. So our approach is really to focus on integrating rehabilitation and AT services into all levels of healthcare. And again, in a lot of communities it's not considered healthcare, so it's over to the side and we're trying to integrate it, make sure it is so that budgeting and decision making can be a part of that. We're also advocating for greater investments into AT and rehabilitation service. So a lot of times we'll go in and work on a investment framework, help them develop an investment framework for AT for that community.

(14:51):

And then training, we mentioned capacity building. We focus on training and rehabilitation professionals and improving education or clinical outcomes for the program. So a lot of times we may be partnered with a university at the curriculum levels. We go in and train the trainers. So we have a number of on call consultants that we use that are physical therapists, occupational therapists that can go in and provide their services. And lastly, we're just always continuously trying to raise awareness about the importance of rehabilitation and AT service.

(15:26):

So the work is wholistic. It has to be done not just in providing the products, but it has to be developing political wheels, shaping policies, advocating, capacity building, making sure there's enough trained professionals. So all those, that's why I say I think they all are critical and that's the work. You just summarize, that's the work that we're trying to do. And I think here often in the US, we take for granted that these things are just happening, but a lot of the communities here, it's unfortunately not.

**Jodi Beckstine** (16:00):

Yeah. That broader vision really highlights that it's about long-term change as well as what you can do in the moment. As you look to the future, what are the next steps for CLASP? Are there new products, new partnerships or regions that you guys are particularly focusing on?

**Charles Redding** (16:20):

Yeah, hopefully all of the above. I mentioned previously CLASP, we've been around 10 years now, it was actually started as a program funded by USAID, USAID, and that's how it

started. And obviously we don't have any more funding from them. So our next step is to just continue to transition to what we call a social enterprise, that we can generate sustainable income while meeting the needs of the lower end, middle income countries that we consider. So we're doing some things to fine tune our model to make sure at the same time we're doing well, we're doing good. We can continue to generate income. We can put back into that model and do more work. We do envision expanding. Right now, our focus has been on mobility. A lot of requests we're getting is beyond mobility. So we're thinking eventually not to be hearing to vision aids as well.

(17:12):

So if we're responding, for example, to a tender that want AT technology, we can bring all of that. We can not just mobility. And now we may not directly do it, but we're going to make sure we have a list of manufacturers or others and partners that we can bring in to provide all three of those. Again, trying to get more of a wholistic service provision to people with disabilities beyond just the mobility.

**Jodi Beckstine** (17:38):

Wow.

**Keith Casebonne** (17:38):

That's incredible. Yeah, that makes sense. That sounds like a logical next step as far as expansion goes. And yeah, that's amazing. Well, this has been so interesting. Before we wrap up, we always ask our guests to share a quote deep cut. So that's a book or a film, it could be a TV show, it could be a song that's been on your mind or that connects in some way to your work. What would you pick? What would be your deep cut?

**Charles Redding** (18:15):

Yeah. And I'm not sure how deep it is, but I keep coming back to what I consider to be an oldie but goodie and people ask me all this time. I just think the book, this is a book or maybe you've probably heard of it. Start With Why by Simon Sinek. It's just a fascinating book. I mean, it's not new and it's something I've kind of patterned my career off of and I think particularly for nonprofits could benefit from that. And we're trying to do that certainly with our work at Momentum. And it is really starting with the why, looking at the why and the what and the how. And I see this a lot. A lot of people want to talk about how they do things or what it is they're doing. And then when I ask the question, "Well, why are you doing it?" And it's not as clear.

(19:01):

And so previously I used to give talks on shifting organizations from outputs to outcomes. So a lot of organizations like to talk about the outputs, how many of these we did, how many of that? And what outcomes though that you have? Are you really answering the question as to why? Why do you exist? And are you really staying true to that? So I think that can lead to personal mission statements, organizational missions, and making sure you stay focused. Yeah. I would just highly recommend that to anyone, particularly leaders, just start with the why. And I think that'll bring so much fire into the work you're trying to do, the people you're trying to hire, the mission you're developing.

(19:44):

If we would just start with the why and not figure out how to do something and then figure out what you want to do. And then lastly, oh, why am I... And then be left later asking a question, "Well, why am I doing this?" And a lot of times you find you're doing the wrong thing. So that's what I want. And again, I don't know how deep it is, but it's certainly something that continues to resonate with me and I'm just going to share it with as many people as I can.

**Jodi Beckstine** (20:13):

I think that's great. That's a great one.

**Keith Casebonne** (20:13):

No, beautiful. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Relevant. Very relevant.

**Jodi Beckstine** (20:17):

One last thing before we go. Is there any question that we may have missed about Wheels for Humanity, anything you want to say about Wheels for Humanity that we haven't discussed so far?

**Charles Redding** (20:30):

I think we hit on it. I mean, I didn't go into great depth, this notion of a social enterprise. Again, this class we've kind of carved it out as sort of its own business entity that we are really... We're trying to generate income, but we're putting it back in there to do more good. So although it's part of that nonprofit structure, the products, these wheelchairs that I talk about, these are not donated products. These are source. We're procuring them. So we're procuring these and we mark them up slightly to keep them affordable and then make sure we are guessing that back into that entity and providing more services over there. So that's

just something, that's CLASP. I want to make sure that that model resonates and it's really just providing such a need out there [inaudible 00:21:21] that can't do.

**Keith Casebonne** (21:22):

Oh yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

**Jodi Beckstine** (21:24):

Well, thank you so much. This has been an incredible conversation.

**Charles Redding** (21:28):

Yeah, this was fun. I enjoyed it.

**Jodi Beckstine** (21:30):

We're grateful for the work that you do and Wheels for Humanity and CLASP does as well.

**Keith Casebonne** (21:35):

Yeah. And thanks for sharing your time with us. We really appreciate it.

**Charles Redding** (21:38):

Sure. Thank you.

**Jodi Beckstine** (21:42):

Stick around. This week's deep cut is on the way.

**Keith Casebonne** (21:51):

Today we're diving into a documentary that challenges how the world understands disability, sport, and power. Rising Phoenix tells the story of the Paralympic Games through the voices of disabled athletes themselves, tracing its roots from post-war rehabilitation to a global movement. Rather than framing disability as limitation, the film asks a bigger question. What happens when disabled people are centered as leaders, competitors, and agents of change?

**Jodi Beckstine** (22:19):

That's right. Rising Phoenix puts disabled athletes in control of their own stories rather than filtering them through commentary or pity. How did that shift in storytelling impact the way you experienced the film?

**Keith Casebonne** (22:32):

Yeah. I loved the focus on the athletes seeing disability as a power. I think one of them even mentioned it's a superpower and you'd have to see it that way and focus on what makes that disability your superpower. And for a lot of people, it's sport. And I think that's really, really cool. I love that they sort of all talked about that in some way. They might not have used the same terminology, but it seemed that everyone that really, they focused on a good bit in the documentary, it was clear that their disability is what gave them their unique ability to compete and helped enforce their identity, not something that they shied away from or felt was a limitation. It was really the opposite. And it was great. It was refreshing and cool without being sappy or silly. It was well told.

**Jodi Beckstine** (23:36):

Yeah. I like that. It was inspirational, of course, but it wasn't in this sappy trope way. It was this empowering way, and I really appreciated that. A lot of people talk about what kind of person would I be if I didn't have my disability? What would my personality be like? What would my body be like? What would my life be like? And they kind of go over that a little bit of how their disability shaped their life and brought them to where they are today. It's really, really interesting.

**Keith Casebonne** (24:03):

It really was. And each one had their own unique story. Each one had their own unique... Even if their physical disabilities were similar in certain aspects, everyone had a very unique story. They did a great job on the diversity of the casting, in my opinion. I mean, people from countries all over the world, number one, but different disabilities, different backgrounds, different stories, things that were from just the issue at birth, congenital disability versus real tragedies that had happened to some people. And they did a really good job putting together the cast and stories behind everything. It was very well done.

**Jodi Beckstine** (24:52):

I agree.

**Keith Casebonne** (24:53):

Yeah. Well, the film also traces the origins of the Paralympics back to rehabilitation, like physical rehab that was being done after World War II. Why is that history important for understanding disability rights and representation today?

**Jodi Beckstine** (25:09):

Well, disability history is important to disability rights because disability rights aren't this big abstract idea. They started with people wanting access, wanting equity, and just trying to survive in the world. Many people after World War II, before World War II, and sometimes even today, are seen through this medical lens as opposed to as human beings, there are problems that need to be managed or need to be just hidden away and not seen. And so I think the doctor that they talk about in the documentary, he felt that disabled people deserved dignity, had dignity, and he used competitive sports as a way to give them that as well as rehabilitate them.

(26:06):

Some of the people he was working with were soldiers coming back from World War II. And instead of just letting them lie there in a bed, it was about rehabilitation and giving them that dignity in their life because people can recover sometimes physically and he was pushing back against the idea that having a disability meant you couldn't have any type of meaningful life. And I think that was a big shift in that society and that time period. And I just really had no idea his take on it and his contribution to disability rights. And it was just an interesting way for them to show the history and the history of the Paralympics.

**Keith Casebonne** (26:54):

Yeah, indeed. I had no idea. It was all new information to me, how the Paralympics started. I had no clue that it would trace back to rehab post World War II in England and be so progressive. I mean, you think of the mid to late '40s, so progressive. I mean, it was explained how really even during the war, and certainly before World War II, a lot of soldiers who would end up having injuries that would maybe cause them a paraplegia or something like that, often would just kind of lie, and for lack of a better putting it, just kind of rot. They were just left. And so many would die within about six months of their injury, and not so much because of the injury, but more because of the lack of care and just being ignored essentially.

(27:49):

And this doctor, again, so ahead of his time, realized that that's silly. There were plenty of... I mean, he even started the idea of moving people around, like rotating people every couple hours so they didn't get bed sores. In my head, I'm like, "They didn't even do that?" That's amazing. I think that required discovery. To me, it's just like you move people around so they don't get sores or-

**Jodi Beckstine** (28:19):

Just makes sense.

**Keith Casebonne** (28:19):

... or whatever. To me, it's right. Nowadays, we just think of that as just a normal thing. So even starting with just that, but then realizing that you could then add the element of sport and things like that, and everyone sort of found their unique niche. And it was such an incredible and yes, inspirational story. Yeah. I was amazed by the history and that alone makes this worthwhile watching. I mean, it's worth for so many other reasons, but that alone, if you just didn't know anything about the history of it, oh yeah, you should watch it.

**Jodi Beckstine** (28:56):

Yeah. He died in 1980 and they had his daughter, did interviews with his daughter. And there was one line in there where she was talking about how he was never home because he was doing the work. He didn't just tell people, "We need to do this." He was actually hands-on doing the work and-

**Keith Casebonne** (29:11):

Turning to patients avoid bedsores. Yeah, he was the one doing it.

**Jodi Beckstine** (29:14):

Yeah. And she didn't have this bitterness about that, about her dad not being home. She knew even as a child that the work that he was doing was so very important and you could just see the pride in her for what her father did. So I liked it a lot. It was very touching.

**Keith Casebonne** (29:34):

That's so true. Yeah, I agree. I agree.

**Jodi Beckstine** (29:35):

So we talked about this a little bit, but the athletes in Rising Phoenix come from different countries and backgrounds, but many share the experience of exclusion and underfunding. The film also shows how from the early days of the Paralympics to today, disabled people have been viewed very differently around the world. One moment that stuck with me was learning that in 1980, the Soviet Union, then the Soviet Union chose not to host the Paralympics at all because they mentioned there it was stated that there's no disabled people in that country.

**Keith Casebonne** (30:06):

Propaganda at its best.

**Jodi Beckstine** (30:08):

Right?

**Keith Casebonne** (30:09):

Yeah.

**Jodi Beckstine** (30:09):

So what does that moment and other moments like that reveal about how attitudes towards disability have shaped access, visibility and opportunities for disabled people globally?

**Keith Casebonne** (30:21):

Well, even if you just frame it in the lens of, we just talked about how progressive in the 1940s this was for someone to even see people who had been injured and leading to a disability to give them the dignity they deserved and help them find their identity and so on to 40 years later post lots of civil rights movements around the world and so on. And we've still got a country that says, "We don't have disabled people," because obviously they look upon people with disabilities as not equal or lower class or they wouldn't say such a thing. Because it's obviously a lie. I mean, instability is part of the human condition and life around the world. So it's just a deeply absurd statement. But yeah, it's kind of fascinating that as many things change, so many things stay the same.

**Jodi Beckstine** (31:19):

Yeah. And there was one athlete who was born in St. Petersburg in the '80s and she talked about what it was like. Her mother could not afford her treatments. She went immediately into an orphanage and then was adopted out. So that's one example of many, many, many of, yes, the Soviet Union did have disabled people and they've grown with the times and come around with that. But I had no idea. When I heard that part, I was like, "You've got to be kidding. There's no way."

**Keith Casebonne** (31:55):

Yeah. Yeah. Same. Right. I had no idea. No idea about that. And then too, we can also look at the fact that... So Rio de Janeiro, part of the story is focused on the 2016 Olympics that ended up .. They kind of go back to talking about 2012 and how it was such a success. London was hosting the Paralympics. It was huge. And now it's going to... They picked Rio

de Janeiro as the host city for 2016. And oh, huge. Everyone's excited. Well, then as it got closer, it started becoming more clear that, I don't want to say the country of Brazil or this... I mean, I don't know where it lies, but somewhere in the planning and work being done to host the Olympics and Paralympics, supposedly, it looked like the Paralympics were giving short shrift.

(32:55):

They were not being considered as important. And in fact, was at highly at risk of not even being held. So that was... Again, it's another... It's part of the package. It's the Olympics and the Paralympics. This is what happens. It's hosted in the same city for the most part. There have been exceptions. Across the world, every four years, every two years now, really, with the winter and summer. And in a way, it should just be a given that that's what happens. And as late as 2016, we're seeing a country that's kind of like seeing it again as, "Oh, it's a second class set of games. It's not as important."

**Jodi Beckstine** (33:38):

Yeah, it's an actual thing.

**Keith Casebonne** (33:40):

"Yeah. We don't really have to have it. We'll just use the money to make the quote regular Olympics better." So that's another example, I think, of this kind of global, I don't know, disparity of how they see things.

**Jodi Beckstine** (33:56):

Absolutely.

**Keith Casebonne** (33:58):

Yeah. Well, sport in the film isn't just about competition. It's also about systems. So how does Rising Phoenix connect athletic achievement to broader issues of access, policy, and social change?

**Jodi Beckstine** (34:13):

I think it shows that sport is never just about what happens on the field or in the arena. Yes, it's about the personal talent of the athlete, but it's also about the systems that are around them. Do they have funding? Do they have access to coaching? The policies in their country and the public attitude, like we were talking about, about people with disabilities. What stood out to me is about the early systems, how they can start shaping opportunities

for people. During the Obama era, we were still talking about whether students who are disabled have equal rights to participate in high school sports.

(34:54):

That wasn't that long ago. It shows that representation and access are tied together. And if young athletes don't see themselves represented, especially in sports, it affects how they grow up believing where they belong. Do they belong in competitive spaces? Do they belong in leadership roles? Do they belong in public life at all? They can feel that way. And I think it connects those early barriers to the bigger picture that when disabled athletes are visible, when they're supported, when they're celebrated, it doesn't just change sporting events. It can change culture and it changes assumptions and pushes systems to adapt, not for us to adapt to those systems. So I think it's just really... Representation is really important. And we say that in a lot of things, and I think it has to start early, especially with sports. People have to, years and years of training to get to that elite level. So it has to start early.

**Keith Casebonne** (36:05):

Yeah, agreed. And sport is a platform for this. I think, again, it's so invaluable and something that I don't want people to think of as, "Oh, just every four years we have the summer Paralympics and then the winter Paralympics." This doesn't just happen every few years. Sport is important to a lot of people around the world. And for people with disabilities, it can be just as important. And it's performed and celebrated all the time. And I think people sometimes don't see that. And a documentary like this really does help show how important sport can be. And again, like we mentioned earlier, it helps define identity, it helps show strengths, it helps build confidence and all those things are important for making someone even just a better self advocate, a better representative for themselves. And I think anything that's done to sort of hinder that, such as not allowing people with disabilities to compete in different types of sports, whether that's playground sports, high school sports, whatever, is such a detrimental thing because again, it's an indication that someone thinks that you are less than. And it's not fair.

(37:45):

I mean, there's so many systems out there, so many areas where people think, "Well, people with disabilities don't do that. They don't have families. They don't get married. They don't do this and that." It's all ridiculous. And this is just another area like, "Oh, they can't play sports." Hell yeah, they can. I mean, have you seen the Paralympics and the Special Olympics and things like that? I mean, yeah. So it's just absurd. It's just absurd when that happens.

**Jodi Beckstine** (38:10):

I was also thinking about, they were talking about, it's every four years based on whether you do summer and winter. There's some athletes that do both. But one of the ladies was talking about, "I have all this training to do in the next four years. This may be my only chance to participate because who knows what's going to happen to my body in the next four years." So not only are they doing all this training and all this work, but they're also living in the world as a disabled person. And that has its own challenges separate from all of that.

**Keith Casebonne** (38:40):

Yeah, good point.

**Jodi Beckstine** (38:41):

So what a hurdle to try to overcome in the four years between the Paralympics. So that was kind of thought-provoking to me.

**Keith Casebonne** (38:54):

Yes, indeed.

**Jodi Beckstine** (38:56):

So one of the strongest messages in Rising Phoenix is the rejection of narrow ideas about strength and success. How does the film redefine what those concepts look like through disabled athletes?

**Keith Casebonne** (39:07):

Yeah. I mean, we kind of touched on this already, but the idea that strength is really more about resilience and adaptability and even an aspect of community building, I think is a part of it. Yeah, strength and success. I mean, the people they talk to, the athletes, and I think anyone that would compete at that level in the Paralympics, whether they were in this documentary or not, I mean, the point is to overcome. I mean, for athletes of any type, disabled or not, you're overcoming a limitation. Until you train and work out and build muscle and get better and better, you don't just wake up and you're an Olympic athlete.

**Jodi Beckstine** (40:02):

Yeah.

**Keith Casebonne** (40:04):

Anyone, any single person on this planet. And so it always involves training and overcoming... Those things are not easy for anyone, so there's always something to overcome. When you're talking about an athlete with a disability, I think you can think of it both the same way and different. Okay. Maybe you could say, "Okay, well, there's something additional that needs to be overcome." But I think in a way that's almost a limiting way to look. Again, we all have to overcome something and we're all different. And so this is just a different thing. What you need to overcome versus what I would need to overcome are just two different things, doesn't really matter.

(40:49):

So to me, that idea of the whole overcoming specifically about, "Oh, they have a disability. They overcame such and such to do this." No. You point back to that same person and say, "Well, everything for you in life was just a breeze? You didn't have to ever overcome anything? You never had to fight hard for something or work hard to achieve something that you weren't just given?" That's life. And so maybe you start looking at things that way versus focusing on disability as some extra unique thing that needs to be overcome.

**Jodi Beckstine** (41:28):

Yeah. And they talk about them being elite athletes that their excellence is based on their own terms. One of the athletes in the documentary stated, "You go to the Olympics and most of the bodies look the same. You're trying to fit this to... And you go to the Paralympics and all the bodies competing in one sport are so different." And it's what a celebration of how different the human beings are and they're all at the elite level of their bodies. And I like that. I appreciate that. What is excellent for me and my body is different for someone else. I just thought that was really a good point that they had made.

**Keith Casebonne** (42:18):

Yeah, I love that. Again, excellence and strength in diversity.

**Jodi Beckstine** (42:24):

Absolutely.

**Keith Casebonne** (42:26):

Well, by the end of the documentary, the Paralympics are framed as a global movement, not just a sporting event. What do you think the film is ultimately asking viewers to reconsider about disability in society?

**Jodi Beckstine** (42:37):

I think it's asking us to reconsider disability as something far bigger than just one individual's experience. A disability can shape based on the culture, based on political identity, shaped by history, policy, not only by the body or the impairments.

(43:03):

And you had mentioned this earlier about the Rio Paralympics possibly not happening. Even at a global event of that scale, disabled athletes were treated as something optional. That's something that, "You know, it can be cut. If we don't have enough money, it's not that big a deal." But the documentary really stressed and drove home the point that these athletes are elite in what they're doing and recognition for them needs to come from institutions. It needs to come from media. It needs to come from the audience showing up and buying tickets. They mentioned several times where they didn't even sell tickets or people didn't even know it was happening, so the stands were almost empty.

(43:56):

So the gap there is not about the ability of the athletes, it's about their visibility and where we see their intrinsic value. And so the film kind of puts that back out on the viewers and the media and the systems. Are we reinforcing old hierarchies and old ways of thinking or are we building something that's inclusive? It's not just about cheering that they're crossing over the finish line. It's about supporting access and providing just as much television coverage and support as other athletes get.

**Keith Casebonne** (44:40):

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. And taking what you're saying a little step further with the lack of ticket sales, for example, in Rio, they hadn't sold tickets. Then when they did, they filled up the place.

**Jodi Beckstine** (44:53):

Yeah. People wanted to see it.

**Keith Casebonne** (44:53):

Everyone was excited. They wanted to see it. And people were just cheering and they're so excited. And I forget which athlete said it, but one of them said that the people were there not so much about disability, but they were cheering because it was an amazing sporting event. It was amazing competition and it was awesome to watch and exciting, no different than the Olympic Games, anything else. It was just good sports and people loved it and that's what really mattered. And so yeah, I mean, of course, the happy ending is that it

happened. They got it going and even though they had a bit of a slow start, they got the ticket sales out there and then it was huge and they kind of showed, London showed that too. And I think the previous, I forgot the previous location, but both of those were very, very, very successful Paralympics. And it was just clear how huge it could be. And when Rio gave it such like a lower class, "Oh, it's not as important or this is optional, it won't matter."

(46:09):

I can imagine how devastating that would be for anyone competing and anyone who's interested and anyone who's a fan, but especially those athletes that trained so hard. And of course, a few of them mentioned like, "Oh my gosh, we didn't even know if we were going to be there. And it was so awful." So in the end, there was great competition, the fans loved it and the disability aspect, it's not even really, it doesn't matter.

**Jodi Beckstine** (46:37):

No.

**Keith Casebonne** (46:38):

It doesn't matter.

**Jodi Beckstine** (46:40):

I don't think a lot of people realize that Olympic athletes and Paralympic athletes paid to go there. They get sponsors and stuff, but the Olympics don't pay to bring them out there. No. So for them to be waiting for... The Olympics were actually happening before they even made the decision about the Paralympics, whether they were happening or not. They've made reservations to where they're going. They've got their tickets, they've got whatever, and it's still in the balance. What stress right before you're supposed to compete, this undue physical stress.

**Keith Casebonne** (47:14):

Yeah, that makes the competition even harder because if you're not even focused on the training as much, you're focused on, you worry too much about if you're even going. And it's just sad. Thankfully, it all worked out in the end for them, but this could happen again in the future. We don't know. Who knows what's going to happen next?

**Jodi Beckstine** (47:33):

Yeah. You feel really secure knowing that the Olympics are going off, but it's unfortunate that it's kind of always, is it happening? Is it not happening?

**Keith Casebonne** (47:42):

Exactly. Exactly.

**Jodi Beckstine** (47:43):

Well, Rising Phoenix reminds us that disability history, culture, and leadership deserve the spotlight. It's not just a sports documentary, it's a call to rethink who we listen to and who we elevate.

**Keith Casebonne** (47:54):

Yeah, for sure. If you haven't watched it yet, Rising Phoenix is streaming now. We'll link more information in the show notes. And if you have seen it, we'd love to hear how it shaped your perspective. Thanks for joining us for this week's deep cut, and we'll keep digging deeper and keep disability at the center of the conversation.

(48:12):

That's a wrap on today's episode. A huge thank you to Charles Redding for joining us and for sharing the work behind CLASP and Wheels for Humanity.

**Jodi Beckstine** (48:20):

This conversation really reminds us that access isn't just about products. It's about systems, sustainability, and making sure people everywhere have what they need to live their lives fully.

**Keith Casebonne** (48:30):

We'll include links in the show notes so you can learn more about CLASP and the work Wheels for Humanity is doing around the world.

**Jodi Beckstine** (48:36):

Thank you as always for listening and being part of this community. We'll see you next time on Disability Deep Dive.

(48:42):

Disability Deep Dive is a podcast that is brought to you by Disability Rights Florida, where real conversations about life, culture, and ideas meet the lived disability experience. Follow us on YouTube, Spotify, and wherever you get your podcasts. You can also find us at DisabilityRightsFlorida.org/podcast.