

Disability Deep Dive Episode 78: Accessible Voices: Building Community Through Blind-Led Media – with Aaron Richmond

Jodi Beckstine (00:00):

What happens when someone who is blind creates a media platform to amplify their community's voice? You get a podcast that makes a real difference. Welcome to Disability Deep Dive.

Keith Casebonne (00:36):

Hey, everyone. I'm Keith.

Jodi Beckstine (00:37):

And I'm Jodi.

Keith Casebonne (00:39):

Today's episode is Accessible Voices, Building Community Through Blind-Led Media, and we're joined by Aaron Richmond from Aaron's Opinion, a podcast and YouTube channel that amplifies stories, conversations, and advocacy within the blindness community.

Jodi Beckstine (00:53):

Aaron's tagline is, "Help one person today, help one million people tomorrow." And that really sums up his approach. He's created a space where blind and disabled voices can share their experience, connect with others, and really inspire change.

Keith Casebonne (01:06):

Yeah, this conversation is a great reminder of why representation matters, not just in the media we consume, but in who is creating it.

Jodi Beckstine (01:14):

And stick around after the episode for our special Deep Cut that ties perfectly into this conversation about accessible media.

Keith Casebonne (01:21):

All right, let's dive in.

(01:28):

Hey, Aaron, thank you so much for being our guest today. It's a real honor to have you here. Let's just start with your podcast, Aaron's Opinion. What inspired you to create it, and what's the story behind the name?

Aaron Richmond (01:39):

Absolutely. Well, good morning everybody. Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening to listeners of Disability Deep Dive, absolutely. My name is Aaron Richmond. What started Aaron's Opinion was about five years ago now, roughly five years ago. During the height of the pandemic, I was, as I still am, doing an enormous amount of teaching online. So my day job is, I'm a bilingual guy, English, French, and I teach English as a second language online. I was spending a lot of time listening to podcasts around the disability community, especially the blindness community, and I felt that they were not open to my opinions, and I noticed that I can't shut up and I love talking to people whether they want to hear my voice or not. So what I started to do-

Keith Casebonne (02:21):

This is how podcasting in general got started.

Jodi Beckstine (02:25):

Yeah.

Keith Casebonne (02:25):

Right?

Aaron Richmond (02:26):

Absolutely. That's the excuse that everyone goes, "I can't shut up and I just want you to listen to me." So what I started to do over time was... I'll pivot back to this in a minute, but from day one of my life, I was immersed in audio, from day one, and that's a bit of a long story, but I've always grown up with audiobooks, radio shows, talk shows. I've always heard it my whole life. What I would do is I would go around on various Facebook groups

for blind people, and I noticed that they were asking different questions about things. "Should I go to college?" "Should I get a guide dog?" "Should I do this?" What I did is I would start getting fed up with all the questions they were asking. So what I would do is I would create an audio file and I would send it back to them and I would say, "Hey Mark, you asked this great question today."

(03:10):

And then over time it started to occur to me that if I'm sending audio out to somebody, that's an audience, and then if you save the audio over a period of time, that's a podcast. So that's how my interest developed, was that I noticed that people need to talk about things and want to talk with me. The show has been through many iterations and restarts and reboots and rebrands over the years, but now I mostly interview blind people and you too obviously, about critical issues in the blindness community and all of their issues from across the universe and galaxy. As I say, I have many listeners all over the world, and that's basically the start of it. But the start of Aaron's Opinion is I love to talk and love to help people to have conversations that they need to have. That's me.

Keith Casebonne (03:52):

Nice.

Jodi Beckstine (03:52):

Wow. Well, I noticed your tagline, "Help one person today, help a million people tomorrow."

Aaron Richmond (03:57):

Thank you so much.

Jodi Beckstine (03:58):

What does that mean to you and how does that guide your work?

Aaron Richmond (04:01):

My tagline, "Help one person today, help a million people tomorrow," is a very humbling tagline, and what it means is that the work that we do here at Aaron's Opinion or what you do there at Disability Deep Dive, it's not about how many downloads I get each week or each day, which certainly we both keep track of that and that's an interesting metric. But the most important part is, it's not about today, it's about tomorrow, meaning 30 years from now, 40 years from now, they'll look back in the archive and they'll say, "Yeah, there

was that Disability Deep Dive podcast. Yeah, that was great." Or they'll look back and they'll say, "Yeah, there was Aaron's Opinion. That's great." So over time, it's about the importance of helping the future and being helpful for the present, but remembering that it's all about the future. It's all about building a happier and a more informed and more knowledgeable tomorrow. So that's kind of how I developed that.

Jodi Beckstine (04:51):

That's great.

Keith Casebonne (04:53):

Yeah, I love that. It's got a really nice bigger picture outlook to it that-

Aaron Richmond (04:58):

Precisely.

Keith Casebonne (04:59):

... I don't know that a lot of other media creators necessarily have.

Jodi Beckstine (05:03):

I agree.

Keith Casebonne (05:04):

Yeah. Yeah, I like that and I see how it's humbling. It's really beautiful actually. Let's talk a little bit about what you believe the role is of blind-led or disability-led media. What is the role? What role does it play in shaping how society understands accessibility, inclusion, things like that?

Aaron Richmond (05:26):

Well, my kind of perception of this and what I have consistently noticed repetitively is that society does not always understand blind people and the abilities that blind people can have. And I do get frustrated as you probably do, both of you do, where there are still unfortunately people that do not have knowledge. So my perception of it is the role, I suppose, if you want to call it a role, I guess, is that blind people should be participating in the podcasts and media space. Whether they listen or whether they host their own show, people need to be participating. But it's not for me, it's not quite a role. I mean, I guess it is. I don't know, it's not quite a role, it's just that I think that blind people need to be participating in society, regardless of being blind.

(06:15):

And that's where I think there's some genuine misunderstanding and some genuine... I don't want to use the word disconnect, but some sort of the portrayal of people with disabilities can be as bad as disability pointing. It can be as good as supporting someone the right way. I guess what I'm trying to say here is that it's not really about the blindness, it's about the quality of the work that they produce outwards. That's what it is for me. It's about, "Okay, if you're blind, but say for instance you're blind, but you're producing bad work or work that other people don't want to hear, well, that's not quite what we want. I want blind people to participate and produce great work that they take pride of."

(07:00):

So that's my role and that's how I view it, is that it needs to fit into the ecosystem of knowledge is how I view it, but also there's always going to be someone better, and there's always going to be someone with more downloads, less downloads. There's always going to be someone different from me or you or you guys. There's always going to be a different. So I don't know, I don't compare in that sense, but blind people need to be participating for sure. So that can be a role. Yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (07:25):

Yeah. Here, Keith has mentioned this before, how disability isn't a monolith and we need to hear all different types of lived experiences when it comes to disability because, especially in media, you get a very narrow idea of what the lived experience is like, and the more people that participate with these lived experiences, the more we can break out of that box that they've put each disability into.

Keith Casebonne (07:52):

And also to add to that real quick, one of the things that I think we've always found both doing the podcast and our work at Disability Rights Florida, a lot of what goes on that affects people with disabilities in a negative way is lack of education. Most people aren't looking to be mean or bad people or do things that hurt people with disabilities, but it's that lack of education and not being open to the idea of, "Wait, this person probably needs me to approach something differently to accommodate them." And so people don't see that. So I think what you're talking about education as being one of those roles that your podcast focuses on, I think that's one of the things I think is exactly needed, is more talk, more education, more of that in this world.

Aaron Richmond (08:42):

Absolutely. Yeah, you're very right. And in addition to education, it's about educating other people in an appropriate way. And I've seen it both ways where the person is trying to get educated about blindness issues or disability issues in the wrong way, and that's also very destructive. So for me, it has to be giving someone knowledge who genuinely wants and cares for it, and they also have to receive the knowledge in an appropriate way and there is a very subtle but very profound difference for sure.

Keith Casebonne (09:13):

Truly.

Jodi Beckstine (09:14):

Definitely. You've built a loyal following across your platforms like YouTube, social media, you have a Discord server. How did you go about building that community and how do you keep them engaged?

Aaron Richmond (09:28):

Thank you, by the way. I want to first preface this by saying my community is a very humble one, it's a very small one. I appreciate that you love it so much, but in the greater scheme of the universe, we have a very small and humble community, but a strong community. I appreciate it very much, absolutely.

Jodi Beckstine (09:45):

Yes.

Aaron Richmond (09:45):

How did I build it? Well, I just kept on doing the same thing over and over again. I kept on repetitively posting things and building up things over the five years. I will say that it's interesting how you notice the Discord and how you mentioned Discord. Let's talk about that. The Discord is really good when you have a big community, but it's very hard one-on-one with Discord. My own opinion of it is it has its uses, but it's a little less conducive to actually following and building an audience. I have found that the thing that builds the audience is the podcast and my Facebook group and the YouTube channel and things like that.

(10:20):

But basically how I built it was I produced consistent content over a period of time and only focused on determining the people who belong on the show and the people who it's not a

good fit for and over time, you just keep building up things. I assigned admins from different countries. I've set up different, as I like to call it, different Aaron's Opinion offices overseas, who are people with disabilities in other countries, who promote what we do. And that's another thing too. You have to figure out what other countries need the information. And that's where it gets really interesting because then the stories you hear from country to country are shockingly the same story just with a different language or a different accent. Yeah.

(11:02):

What about you guys? Have you guys built up a community on Discord? What do you guys do for communities for Disability Deep Dive?

Jodi Beckstine (11:10):

We don't have a Discord, but we do have social media platforms-

Aaron Richmond (11:14):

That's good

Jodi Beckstine (11:14):

... that we've been using. Keith, but no more. He's been doing Disability Deep Dive for the podcast itself way longer than I have.

Keith Casebonne (11:22):

Yeah. And I think social media is the biggest place for that. We do also have an open email address podcast@disabilityrightsflorida.org that folks can contact us if they have questions, ideas, topics, and so on, and we get emails here and there, but we haven't done the same sort of... I guess, when you think of it in the sense of what Discord is, our community building has been a little bit different, and maybe it's something we should look into more. Maybe it's something that might be good for us as well. So it's interesting. I mean, this is why we do this. This is why we want to talk to different people and get some different ideas and find out what works and what doesn't work.

Jodi Beckstine (11:59):

Yeah.

Aaron Richmond (12:01):

Sure. Absolutely. The thing that I would tell anybody is, and this is the most subtle thing of all, you're going to get different types of audience members from different types of platforms. YouTube, people who watch YouTube videos, are people that like to watch videos. People who listen to podcasts are people who like to listen. People who are on Discord to talk, discord, have a speech or a conversation. So it depends. So my question back to you would be when, what type of community are you trying to build and who's your audience? If you want people who want to talk and just want to talk, then Discord would be better. If you want people who want to listen, then keep building up the podcast. If you want people to watch you and interact with you without talking, then YouTube would be the answer. If you want to be successful and all of them, then just keep doing what you do and good luck. Good luck, because the vacuum of information is expanding rapidly. These past five years have been a massive expansion of social media and development and video and podcasting, for sure. Yeah.

Keith Casebonne (13:03):

Yeah. No, that's for sure. And when the show was created, I mean, this is a production of Disability Rights Florida, which is a nonprofit organization and part of a national network of organizations that protect and advocate for people with disabilities, and the focus at the time when it was started was more about just informing, education and then also bringing more awareness to Disability Rights Florida. Now, it's grown a lot since then. If you listen to episodes from, oh my God, nine years ago now, jeez. If you listen to episodes from eight, nine years ago, they have an entirely different feel than episodes you listen to now or even two, three, four years ago. And that's kind of like, I guess you mentioned there, and we've had stops and starts, and not necessarily rebranding per se, but sort of refocusing on what types of guests we're going to have or what do we want to communicate.

(13:56):

And so I think for a little while it was finding our way, but it's a good question, and I think it's a question that content creators of all types really should ask themselves often, because you can get into a rut. You can get just doing the same thing and not expanding and wondering, "Why isn't anybody listening or watching or reading or whatever anymore?" I think this is a good conversation to have amongst creators, podcasters, et cetera, and so I'm glad we're just free chatting about this a little bit.

Aaron Richmond (14:27):

Of course. Yeah, and your organization is really interesting too. Certainly, we'll uncover it and certainly at the end, but I know that you guys are going to be soon guests here at Aaron's Opinion, obviously. I would love to interview both of you.

Keith Casebonne (14:39):

Oh, that's a yes.

Aaron Richmond (14:40):

Yeah, that's going to be great. And one of the questions I'll ask, but one of the questions that's occurring to me now. So your organization though, the nonprofit, Disability Rights Florida. So how do you guys really understand and explain to other people about protecting and advocating for people with disabilities? Because that's a loaded thing to be able to do. What does that actually mean?

Keith Casebonne (15:00):

You want to take that, Jodi, or you want me to handle it?

Jodi Beckstine (15:03):

You start, and then I'll finish up because I'm newer than you are, but I've got my ideas.

Keith Casebonne (15:09):

Yeah. And Jodi's more boots on the ground when it comes to communication, social media, that sort of thing. So we're going to probably see it from slightly different perspectives too. But yeah, it's a tough message to get out there, in fact, without getting into too much history. And we'll save maybe some more of that detail for when we're on your podcast, but years ago... The network's been around for 40 plus years, almost 50 years now, and a lot of the organizations were named, like, I'll pick a random state, Michigan Protection and Advocacy Services. Okay, great. Protection and advocacy for what? I started in Louisiana at a group called The Advocacy Center. Okay, then when I moved to Florida, we were also called coincidentally, The Advocacy Center. Great. Advocate for what? So there was a lot of, we don't even know what these agencies do.

(15:54):

So there became a big rebranding of sorts, 15, 20, I might have the years wrong, but our parent organization was the same thing. National Association of Protection and Advocacy For... It meant nothing. So they rebranded to the National Disability Rights Network. "Oh, okay. Now we know what you're talking about." And most of the states at this point, there's a few that haven't, but the vast majority of the states have also then followed that lead. And so advocacy center in Florida became Disability Rights Florida, and we've got Disabilities Rights Louisiana, Disability Rights California, New York, et cetera. So a number of them follow that format. They don't all, but even the ones that don't follow it have rebranded. So

that alone helped with the messaging, but still, you have to have heard of us. You have to know who we are. And so when it comes to getting that word out there, I think that's where I'm going to turn it over to you, Jodi, and talk about some of your initiatives that you've been doing to help out.

Jodi Beckstine (16:56):

Sure. I've been here with Disability Rights Florida for about six months, so I'm still hitting my stride with them. And for me, it's a twofold message. Disability rights is here to assist and to help, but we also want to educate on how to advocate for yourselves. So it's a partnership is how I view it. So for me, it's about educating what we do and the importance of our organization, and also how you can advocate for yourself in the gaps. Because unfortunately, there's gaps in what people need and services that they have and waiting for services. So for me, the messaging is a twofold education and self-advocacy alongside all the things that disability rights does as well. Does that make sense?

Keith Casebonne (17:43):

Yes. Very good. Well, so turning back to your show, Aaron, what have been some of the most powerful, or maybe surprising even, stories that you've shared on your show?

Aaron Richmond (17:56):

I've shared a lot over the years with people with disabilities. We've had people that come and talk about all sorts of things from blindness issues, invisible disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and I've had people that have spoken about it all. I guess what really surprises me, if you... Well, at this point, nothing really surprises me anymore really. I'm not terribly surprised by any story, only because I hear so many stories that are so shockingly similar, so because there's so much similarity and so much of a necessity to have these conversations. One thing that concerns me, and one thing that surprises me is, I would say, the need that people have to share their story, but also how resonant people are and how shy people can be when it comes to approaching people in the media space.

(18:51):

So that's something that's really shocking to me is that I wish people had more confidence to speak up. And I think that one of the reasons why we fortunately and unfortunately need all these disability rights for each state is because people with disabilities don't know how to speak up appropriately and that is a truly scary thing. There's a right way to speak up and a wrong way to speak up, and people really need to learn the difference between the two.

Jodi Beckstine (19:22):

What challenges do you face as a blind content creator when it comes to accessibility in digital platforms, and what changes would you like to see?

Aaron Richmond (19:33):

Yeah, I think the greatest challenge is being consistent, producing consistent content over a number of years. I've actually found that the technological barriers to podcasting have tremendously disappeared over the years. 10 years ago, 15 years ago, having a podcast conversation like this would've been a lot more effort. This would've been a lot more complicated. We would've needed a lot more equipment. But now we're able to sit in an office and build out a global product that's downloaded all over the world now, and that's a really spectacular thing.

(20:04):

So I think the reasoning why podcasting is powerful is because there's really no barrier to entry. It's another huge thing in the disability community. There can be many barriers to entry in certain fields that restrict people from reaching their goals and reaching their potential. A barrier to entry, they've affected me, and they affect a lot of people who never really admit that they're affected by it, because then they just have to move on. So that's really destructive. But no, I've found that podcasting is a media form that releases barriers. It takes down the walls of restrictions, and it invites people to share what they really think, and that's how podcasting has the power it does.

Keith Casebonne (20:46):

Yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (20:48):

Awesome.

Keith Casebonne (20:50):

Yeah, I can relate to when we first started podcasting. The idea of even doing this remotely, if a listener doesn't realize it. It's not Zoom technically, but we're kind of on a video conference call right now recording this so we can talk to anybody in the world essentially if we wanted to. When we first started, I still have the table actually, but there's this round table in my office that I had a Blue Yeti microphone in the center, and anyone that wanted to be in the podcast sat around the table, and I was sitting there with headphones on, moving the microphone around, trying to find where in this table would be the best place to

put it so that all three of us have about the same volume. No mixing. It was bad. It was really bad. And you can hear the quality.

Aaron Richmond (21:27):

It takes practice to speak into a microphone, and every mic has its perfect little spot where it wants to, and you have to sit exactly right. I've noticed that part has become more sensitive as the technology's improved. You have to get it just right and each microphone is just a little bit different, and everybody's voice is different. The other thing is everybody's environment is different. So that's why everybody sounds a little different and why nobody will sound the same. Yeah, exactly.

Keith Casebonne (21:52):

No, very true. Very true. Yeah. Yeah. Well, so in the same vein here, so for those folks listening who want to support or maybe even create their own more inclusive media, what's one piece of advice or several pieces of advice if you want, that you'd like to offer?

Aaron Richmond (22:13):

I think they should get into podcasting. I really do. If you're a great speaker, if you want to talk all day, I would say get into podcasting. I would say guest on my podcast. Come and talk to me because I love helping other people get into podcasting and giving advice and teaching people about the steps of building a podcast and getting it started and developing the RSS over time and things like that. But my advice is come and talk to me. I'm more than happy to help, and I really enjoy talking about it and helping people to get into the industry and things like that. We need more people in podcasting, not less. Yeah, definitely.

Jodi Beckstine (22:49):

I agree.

Keith Casebonne (22:51):

No, totally. And I'll throw in a resource that's out there, and I don't know if you remember or not, honestly, Aaron, but podaccess.net is a collection of disability and blind-led podcasts out there, and 80-something odd podcasts are registered on there right now, and we're on there too. And so it's a good way for the community of disabled podcasters to keep in touch. There's other resources on there, tips on accessibility, things like that. So I'm just saying that out there as a resource for anyone out there who might be interested. It's a good place, even if you don't have a show yet, to go on and start to figure out some of the things you need to do to make an accessible product.

Jodi Beckstine (23:36):

Yeah, they're great. Part of this new Disability Deep Dive, we used to be called You First, and we've changed it up a little bit, is we talk about a piece of media, whether it's a song, a movie, a television show, a book, and Keith and I will talk about something like that. To wrap it up, is there a book or a film or song that reflects your mission, Aaron's Opinion, or it's been on your mind lately that you're really enjoying?

Aaron Richmond (24:04):

I would say there's not really any particular book or song that represents what I do really. I would say no, there really isn't. I would say, I don't know, not really. Only because I don't compare myself to other people, so I can't relate to something else in that sense. But no, I would say I can't really think of any particular song or media piece. I listened to your most recent episode, by the way, and you were asking your guest in that one about that, and that was a little bit more clear, that topic. But in this case, I would say there's not really a particular song or a particular piece of media that would really represent what we do, really. Yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (24:43):

How about you personally that you enjoy? What type of media do you consume when you're not listening to podcasts?

Aaron Richmond (24:48):

Yeah, if I'm not listening to podcasts or creating my own, I'm a huge language acquisition and linguist nerd. So I love talking about foreign language acquisition. That's one of the things that really fixates me is being a bilingual guy. And I'm bilingual English, French, so I love talking to French people and things like that. And I also love watching scary movies and horror films and creepy videos and stuff like that. I have a great interest in mysterious mysteries, you name it. If there's some conspiracy theory out there, I want to learn about it. I love some of that crazy stuff. Not too crazy, but sometimes I just need to relax, and the only way to relax is to hear something else that's crazy, to relieve myself of the other crazy that I just got done listening to. So there's some great stuff out there. If you need more conspiracy theory, just come to me. I'll either share the stuff I'm listening to or I'll create my own theory for you.

Keith Casebonne (25:47):

Sounds good, yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (25:47):

Okay.

Keith Casebonne (25:49):

There you go. I think we just found that the topic of your next show, your second podcast.

Aaron Richmond (25:53):

Oh no, you guys don't understand. I can't talk about that on a podcast. We can talk about that on my own show. No, my own shows we've covered enough. Don't trust me. There's been plenty of conspiracy theory on Aaron's Opinion. In fact, people have shared a lot of fascinating stories, and people do that because sometimes it gives people a leverage. It gives people a way to talk and to open up. And I think that's why so much of society is fixated by conspiracy and unknown. It's because we like to believe and then we like to talk about it. So that's kind of the fundamental.

Keith Casebonne (26:24):

That's interesting.

Aaron Richmond (26:26):

But that's what I like to do. Yeah, I love my languages and I love strange videos and creating great podcast episodes and learning from others in the disability space. That's me. Yeah.

Jodi Beckstine (26:35):

That's fantastic.

Keith Casebonne (26:36):

Wonderful. I love it.

Jodi Beckstine (26:38):

We're so glad you decided to join us today.

Aaron Richmond (26:40):

I'm so glad you guys reached out to me. I was very honored and very impressed that you did. I didn't really know much about you until I started researching, but I'm really glad you guys reached out when you did.

Keith Casebonne (26:50):

Yeah, absolutely.

Jodi Beckstine (26:52):

Wonderful.

Keith Casebonne (26:53):

We're glad that you're able to join us. We're looking forward to being on Aaron's Opinion. And yeah, this has really been a great conversation, and I love when we get into some of the meta stuff on podcasting, with podcasting about podcasting sort of thing. That's always fun. So we're looking forward to taking the conversation to your show next. And once again, thanks so much for being with us today.

Aaron Richmond (27:16):

You guys are always welcome on Aaron's Opinion. Absolutely.

Jodi Beckstine (27:18):

Thank you.

Aaron Richmond (27:19):

So welcome.

Jodi Beckstine (27:33):

This Week's Deep Cut takes us to Lift Me Up, a stunning collaboration between disabled artists, Lachi, James Ian and Gaelynn Lea. It's more than just a song. It's a love letter to Judy Heumann's legacy and to the disability community she helped empower.

Keith Casebonne (27:49):

What's so moving about this video is that it's not just accessible, it's centers accessibility from ASL to captions to audio descriptions. It reflects the future of what we want to see in pop culture, disabled artists leading the way on screen and behind the scenes.

Jodi Beckstine (28:06):

Okay, so let's start with Judy Heumann, because this tribute wouldn't exist without her incredible legacy. What stood out to you the most about how this video honored her legacy?

Keith Casebonne (28:16):

Yeah, I thought that was so amazing. You don't hear music like that. I don't know if you'd call it RNB or something along those lines, but you don't hear modern pop music very often celebrating the life of a disability rights activist. So first of all, that alone is just, wow, this is incredible. I love that it was thought about. And she's not a household name. You and I, very familiar with her because of what we do and so on, but it's not someone that everyone's going to be familiar with. So I loved that first of all, they just even did that and that they put a pop song out there. That's what it's about. That alone is really heartwarming to me. I love that.

(28:54):

Judy Heumann lived her life as a disability rights pioneer, lifelong advocacy, just incredible life story. And in fact, we have an episode from a couple of years ago called Honoring Judy Heumann that goes into all of that. So if you don't know a lot about her and you want to learn more, listen to that episode 'cause we went through from birth to death, Judy Heumann's greatest hits and just her life of advocacy. It's really impressive. But yeah, what stood out most is just that it was about her, and I think that was just fabulous.

Jodi Beckstine (29:26):

Rather than talking about her just as a historic perspective, why do you think it's powerful to see her remembered through art instead?

Keith Casebonne (29:35):

Yeah, the impact that she had on so many people, so many generations of individuals with disabilities included a lot of activists and artists, and it's just an area that I think she had a lot of love and respect for. And so to see other musical artists wanting to remember her and do that through their art, through song, I just think is really touching and shows that they really know who she is and the things that she valued and enjoyed. So I think that is part of the thoughtfulness of the whole thing.

Jodi Beckstine (30:10):

So you believe it reflects her belief and joy and culture and community as part of her activism?

Keith Casebonne (30:16):

Oh, yeah. Oh, for sure. It definitely celebrates her role as a mentor, as a friend, a change maker, and it's the kind of stuff that she fought for. Honestly, if it wasn't for Judy Heumann

and others like her, would we have a video that focuses on the ASL interpreters almost more than the artist, has audio description in the beginning, which I mean, right there alone just blew me away that it's opened with audio. I've never seen a music video that had anything even similar to an audio description track, so that was fabulous. So I think just the idea that they even did it this way really does celebrate who she was and she helped make these things possible.

Jodi Beckstine (30:56):

Absolutely.

Keith Casebonne (30:58):

So beyond being a tribute, this video is an example of what truly accessible pop culture can look like. What do you think makes this video such a great example of accessible inclusive art?

Jodi Beckstine (31:11):

The fact that the accessibility just isn't added on, it's built into the whole center of this piece. The ASL performers aren't tucked into a corner or down in the bottom of the screen. They are front and center right in the thick of it. You mentioned the audio description at the beginning, the captions. It's everything that we always say when we're talking about things being accessible, that we want to be included and to elevate the piece instead of limiting it.

Keith Casebonne (31:41):

Yeah, yeah, I totally agree. So how does centering disabled performers change the way that we experience the song?

Jodi Beckstine (31:48):

I think it changes the energy of the whole thing. You're seeing members and artists of the disability community right there represented. Again, not off to the side, they're right there, and you could feel the authenticity of them displaying their art and showing their love for Judy. It's not other people telling the story for them. It's their voices, it's their artistry, it's their vision, it's their beings right there.

Keith Casebonne (32:18):

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I was even surprised that the audio description in the beginning, I didn't recognize her voice, but I saw it in the credits that Ali Stroker, who was also a very well-celebrated performer with disability in her own right, did that audio

description. So again, just a little touch, like a little something extra that you might not even realize. But again, even that was done by an individual with disability that I'm sure had been touched by Judy Heumann. So what could other artists and media creators learn from this project?

Jodi Beckstine (32:47):

We talked a little bit about this with Aaron in his segment, that it's important to have disabled representation both in front of and behind the camera, the mic, whatever and I think that, for me, is the biggest takeaway. That accessibility, again, does not have to be an afterthought. Center that disabled talent, make the design accessible from the very beginning and what you end up with is going to be something so much richer, so much more creative, so much more powerful. And to me, this video is proof that type of inclusion just makes it better for everyone involved.

Keith Casebonne (33:25):

Yeah, no, I totally agree. And the accessibility in there, like you said, it's part of the whole story, and it really enhances the artistry. It doesn't take away from it in any way.

Jodi Beckstine (33:34):

Absolutely.

Keith Casebonne (33:37):

Lift Me Up isn't just a tribute, it's a road map. It shows us what's possible when disabled voices lead the way in art and storytelling.

Jodi Beckstine (33:45):

You can watch the music video on YouTube. We've linked it in the show notes. It's a must watch for anyone who wants to see what true inclusion in pop culture can look like.

Keith Casebonne (33:54):

Well, that is This Week's Deep Cut. Thanks for diving in a little deeper with us.

(34:04):

That's it for today's episode of Disability Deep Dive. A huge thank you to Aaron for joining us and sharing how Aaron's Opinion has become such a powerful voice in the blindness community.

Jodi Beckstine (34:14):

Aaron's work is such a great example of what happens when accessibility and creativity come together, and how one person's passion can ripple out and help so many others.

Keith Casebonne (34:24):

If you enjoyed this episode, make sure to subscribe. Leave us a review and share it with someone who'd love to hear it.

Jodi Beckstine (34:30):

And don't forget to check out Aaron's work. His podcast and YouTube channel can be found wherever you get your podcasts, and on YouTube at Aaron's Opinion TV.

Keith Casebonne (34:38):

Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time on Disability Deep Dive.

Announcer (34:43):

Disability Deep Dive is produced by Jodi Beckstine, Keith Casebonne and Disability Rights Florida, Florida's protection and advocacy agency. You can learn more about the services we provide, explore a vast array of resources on a variety of disability-related topics, and complete an online intake at disabilityrightsflorida.org. Any comments about the podcast can be sent to podcast@disabilityrightsflorida.org. Thank you for listening to Disability Deep Dive.