

PODCAST Episode 440

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Disability Screen Office, inclusive storytelling, accessibility standards, disabled creatives, Canadian screen industry, disability representation, industry resource hub, production accessibility role, mapping representation, screen festival accessibility, disability advocacy, industry partnerships, accessibility training, disability inclusion.


SPEAKERS

Steve Barclay, Rob Mineault, Ryan Fleury, Alethea Bakogearge


 **Rob Mineault 00:13**
Hey and welcome to another episode of AT Banter,


 **Steve Barclay 00:18**
Banter, banter.


 **Rob Mineault 00:19**
This, of course, the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Ye have little faith. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault, and joining me today. Mr. Ryan Fleury.


 **Ryan Fleury 00:38**
Good morning, everyone.


 **Rob Mineault 00:40**
Oh, hey, and look who else in here. It's Mr. Steve Barclay.


 **Steve Barclay 00:43**
Where?


 Ryan Fleury 00:43
Over there.


 Steve Barclay 00:45
Oh, so I am,

 Rob Mineault 00:48
How would the heck are you guys today?


 Ryan Fleury 00:51
Fabulous.

 Steve Barclay 00:53
Oh, on a scale of one to 10, I'm about to two thirds of a coffee.

 Rob Mineault 01:00
Actually, you know, over the weekend, I was reading the Google machine, and I was, I, I forget what the stat was, but it was something, it was something crazy about the number of podcasts are actually out there, like, it's just, it's millions, millions of people have podcasts...

 Ryan Fleury 01:20
But how Many have gone stale? How many are still active?

 Rob Mineault 01:23
I don't know. I just think it's so interesting, and it's so interesting that, you know, we started this thing when people didn't know what a podcast was, and now here we are in the crowd, and yeah, just everybody and their dog has a podcast. s

 Ryan Fleury 01:39
Still ranking in the top 10 to 25 depending on which website you're looking at, for assistive tech podcasts.

- .
- S** Steve Barclay 01:46
Yeah, and technically, we started this podcast when we didn't know what podcasts were.
- R** Rob Mineault 01:55
I remember having to explain to people, like, how you even access podcasts. This is, this is all pre Spotify and stuff. So I don't know. Why do I always bring up topics that make me feel old?
- R** Ryan Fleury 02:13
Because you are old?
- S** Steve Barclay 02:14
Yeah, yeah, there's that.
- S** Steve Barclay 02:17
What was it like storming the beaches in Normandy Rob?
- R** Rob Mineault 02:20
Oh, listen. I was in the 'Nam for the record. Anyways, enough banter. Let's get to the meat of the show, because I am, once again, very excited. We're talking about one of my favorite topics. So yeah, let's get let's get things started. So Ryan?
- R** Ryan Fleury 02:47
Yeah, Rob?
- R** Rob Mineault 02:48
What the heck are we doing today?
- R** Ryan Fleury 02:51
Well, today we are speaking with Alethea Bakogeorge, who is the Director of Programs and Development at the Disability Screen Office. Alethea, welcome to AT Banter.

A

Alethea Bakogorge 03:02

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

R

Rob Mineault 03:05

And yeah, thanks so much. You know, movies, movies, TV, media, the arts. These are all some of my favorite things. Maybe, if you can just give us a really brief overview for the audience of what Disability Screen Office does.

A

Alethea Bakogorge 03:21

Yeah, absolutely. So the DSO - Disability Screen Office - is a national bilingual disability led and 100% disability staffed, not for profit organization, and we have a mission to develop opportunities for disabled creatives and advocate for a more accessible Canadian screen industry. So through our partnerships and programs, we are setting a new national standard for inclusive screen based storytelling.

R

Rob Mineault 03:49

So talk to me a little bit about your particular background and what led you to the role that you play there at DSO.

A

Alethea Bakogorge 03:56

Absolutely. So I've been working in disability advocacy for the better part of a decade, I am a person who has cerebral palsy, and I began my journey in the arts as somebody who really, really, really wanted to be on Broadway. And when I was about 17 or 18, I decided that the best path for me was to go to theater school in the United States, and when I was in theater school in the United States, studying for my BFA in Musical Theater, I experienced a lot of disability related discrimination. In fact, some of the faculty in my in my musical theater program actually wanted to dismiss me from the program because of my disability, which is not only abhorrent, it's also illegal. But I realized very quickly that this kind of thing happens all the time, and happens to artists with a variety of disability experiences across the continent and across the world. And you know, it was really interesting to me, because I was being told over and over again by my faculty that I wasn't going to succeed or be competitive in the industry because of my disability, but then my first big job out of theater school was actually playing a disabled character on the US national tour of Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, so the musical adaptation of the children's show, and as I was traveling across the country with my castmates to 37 States over the course of a year, I really discovered the inaccessibility of theater spaces. So there were lots of times where I can't really climb multiple flights of stairs, and there were lots of times where my castmates would have beautiful dressing rooms somewhere in the theater, but they were up three flights of stairs, and there was no elevator. And so my dressing room de facto became a corner of the stage, you know, curtained off with a little bit of pipe and

drape, which is not only it not only separated me so much from my castmates, but it's also a dehumanizing experience, and I realized that that must be what so many other disabled artists are experiencing across the country. And so when I came off tour and moved back to Canada, moved back to Toronto, which is where I grew up, I really decided that I wanted to bring the disability advocacy piece to the other things that I was doing in my career, which was arts administration. So really, I sort of came up through the industry as a fundraiser, working in live performance and working in theater for a variety of different theater companies in Toronto. And at the same time, I was doing a lot of disability advocacy, including becoming the first full time accessibility manager at an Ontario theater company. So that was what I was doing immediately prior to the disability screen office. And when I saw the disability screen office posting become available a little bit over a year ago, I was really excited by the role, because as Director of Programs and Development, not only do I focus on fundraising for the organization, and raising the profile of the organization, continuing to garner support for the organization, but I'm also in charge of scaling the multiple strategic programs that we have growing at the Disability Screen Office. And it's a really exciting time to be at the DSO, because we are still a relatively new organization. We were originally incubated at Accessible Media Inc, and then became an autonomous organization in September 2022 and then April 2023 marked the beginning of the first operational year for the DSO, and that's when we started to staff up. So now in 2025 it's a really exciting time, because we've grown from a staff of one to a staff of five, and we've got a variety of programs that are designed to address some of the program some of the problems that we are seeing in the film and television industry across the country.

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Rob Mineault 07:50

So can you kind of tell us a little bit about the types of programs that that the DSO offers to creators that are that are have disabilities?

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 08:01

So the DSO has a variety of programs, and we've got both industry side programs - so programs that are designated to help folks and institutions, organizations, unions, guilds, associations, adapt their processes within the industry to make the industry more accessible. And then we've also got programs that are directed at disabled creatives to help them build relationships, build their careers and continue to succeed in the industry. So we've got about five major programs. We're growing a sixth at the same time, which is a really which is so exciting, but it means that there's so much going on at the DSO. And our first flagship program is actually a research study. It's called mapping representation and barriers to participation by people with disabilities in the screen based media and broadcasting sectors. And yes, that is an extraordinarily long title, as I think all research has to have, in my opinion, but it is Canada's first ever multi year study on the participation of people with disabilities in the Canadian Screen sector and the barriers that they face in the labor market. So essentially, what we discovered as we were consulting with the industry, as this organization continued to incubate, was that we actually don't know how many people with disabilities are working in the Canadian Screen sector? Of course, we have census data on how many people are living with disabilities in Canada, and StatsCan has data on how many people are working in the screen sector in total. But those two numbers have never actually been crossed. So we are partnering with a variety of organizations, including the Quebec based organization Coalition Media, and we've also commissioned creative industries research firm Nordicity to undertake research to really find

out what is going on in our sector, and to really figure out, you know, what are the barriers that people face in the labor market, and what do people need to succeed in our sector? So we are really trying to figure out how many people in our sector are working with disabilities, what those disabilities are, what the most common barriers they are, that they're facing, and how we can dismantle those barriers.

R

Rob Mineault 10:18

Yeah, that's really interesting, you know, because when we talk about inclusion these days, there's a lot of talk about in front of the camera, representation and all that. But I haven't heard too many people really talk about or address the idea of accessibility and inclusion behind the scenes.

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 10:39

Absolutely. And, you know, I think it's very interesting because I mentioned the census data that we have from stats. Can you know the numbers from 2022 the last Canadian census are that 27% of all adults over the age of 15 are living with at least one disability? That is a huge number. And so what we know as an organization that serves the disability community within the film and television sector, we know that there must be hundreds and 1000s of people who are either downplaying or hiding their disabilities within our sector, and many of them are, as you mentioned, probably behind the camera, below the line, Working in production offices, working in writers rooms, and who feel scared or nervous to share their disability, either, because we hear this a lot, people don't want to take away opportunities from other people, to which we say there is no hierarchy of disability, and we really want as many people as possible if you are comfortable, to be comfortable sharing your disability, or, number two, they are worried that divulging their disability is going to make them less employable. And really what we are looking to do with this research is to share, not only a research report to show the industry how many disabled people are already working within our industry, but we're also going to be publishing a foundational Best Practices Guide outlining standards and guidelines for disability representation and inclusion, both on screen and off screen, so that people feel that there are resources available to them. So if they want to disclose their disability, or if someone finds out that they are working with a colleague with a disability, they have somewhere to go to find resources to be able to best support that person.

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Rob Mineault 12:32

It sounds like you guys are still kind of finding your feet, and, you know, I assume that that you're doing all of this work gathering data so that you can, you can build up more programs and just kind of see what's needed in the industry. Does it kind of shock you that this hasn't been done before?

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 12:56

You know the DSO is really based on the work that has existed across this country for many decades, like I said, we were incubated initially by Accessible Media, Inc, who brought together, back in 2021 a group of creators, writers, directors and performers for a series of roundtable

back in 2021 a group of creators, writers, directors and performers for a series of roundtable discussions. And basically those roundtables had the goal of identifying barriers, preventing equal access and authentic representation in the industry, and then to propose solutions to increase accessibility. But really quickly, it became clear that there was no single policy or program that could solve all of the problems. So that's why we really felt that a national organization was needed. It's not that people haven't tried to, you know, access this data on smaller scales before. It's not that people haven't tried to make the screen sector or the Canadian art sector in general, more accessible in a variety of different ways across the country. That's not the case at all. And the DSO is actually really here to amplify the work that has already been done from coast to coast over the over the course of many decades. It's just that now we have a national organization that can really support things that are going on in different parts of the country, to be able to elevate everybody from coast to coast. But yes, it is surprising that nobody has done a real national analysis of disability before, and I think that here at the DSO, we're really excited to see what the findings of this research are going to be as we look towards publishing this in 2027 and also how the data is going to change over the years, because this is research that we're really looking to repeat.

R

Rob Mineault 14:41

Do you guys work with, like disability consultants, people who would go out there and and work with, with the the art sector to improve the idea of representation?

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 14:54

Yeah. I mean, so one of the things that the DSO is working on right. Now is actually putting together an industry resource hub, which is going to be a searchable database featuring a variety of accessibility and disability related resources for the Canadian Screen sector. And we're going to launch it in two phases. So Phase One, that's going to launch later this year, is going to feature listings for venues with accessibility features for both productions and screening accessibility service providers, and then other resources designed to make productions and workflows more inclusive. And people are going to be able to go on this this hub and search it by industry, role, by service type, by disability category that they serve, by region, province, language, and more. And then phase two, which is going to be anticipated in future years, is going to introduce a database of disabled creatives and crew, where individuals can create a profile with information about their work and their disability. And then producers and engagers will be able to request credentials to browse the platform to search for individuals who might be a right fit for their production. You know, say they're looking for a writer with mini room experience, who is blind or low vision, who's from Atlantic, Canada, they're going to be able to search for that. And you know, in terms of the version of the hub, this first phase of the hub that is launching this fall. Certainly, accessibility consultants are included in that. But one of the other things that the DSO is working on is a new initiative called the production accessibility role, or the prod Access Initiative, and it's offered, we are offering it in association with the National Screen Institute, and it's going to formalize a new managerial level role in the Canadian screen industry that's dedicated to supporting accessibility across productions of all sizes. So essentially, what we're seeing now in the Canadian screen industry is that often we have accessibility consultants brought on to a production. We have someone who is brought on to bring strategic advice about the portrayal of a certain character, or somebody who might be brought on, you know, two or three weeks before principal photography begins to give advice about, okay, you have a wheelchair user who is working on

this project. How can we make, you know, this set, this location that we are shooting on more accessible. The problem with consulting is that consulting carries a certain connotation, that it's just a recommendation, and sometimes consultants are brought on board to a project, and their recommendations are perhaps not taken, or there are recommendations that are offered that are out of budget. Or, you know, somebody is asking the accessibility consultant to sign off on something that they might not be comfortable with from a disability representation or a disability justice perspective. And so what we are really trying to do here at the DSO is to create a new role that's going to build on the success of Accessibility Coordinators that we have seen have success in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and France. But this role here is going to influence decisions on hiring, on location, on budget, on scheduling. They're going to collaborate with key creatives, both above the line and below the line, to develop and maintain accessibility plans. They are going to be able to deliver tailored accessibility training to production teams based on their specific needs. They're going to act as a trusted contact for self identification and accommodation requests. Because, as I mentioned, we think that there are a lot of people in this industry who are hiding or downplaying their disability. They're going to create accessible environments, because they're going to be the ones to review budgets, floor plans, locations, and they're going to be the ones who are managing accommodations like ASL interpretation, transportation options, cited guides, document, accessibility, that kind of thing, and this new role is going to ensure that accessibility is embedded at every stage of the production process. And since it's a managerial level position, we are hoping that this means that more accessibility recommendations are going to be integrated into the productions that we're seeing across the country. So what we are doing, in association with the National Screen Institute, which is out of Manitoba, is we are developing a Production Accessibility role training program where we are going to be taking in a small cohort in 2026 to train them in all the skills that they need to succeed in this new managerial level role, and then ideally in late 2026 and early 2027 we're going to be putting them into placement on the field so that we can learn about how this role actually needs to work in process. And we are very fortunate to have the support of many unions, guilds and associations, because we recognize. This role sort of sits between the jurisdictions of a variety of different screen unions, guilds and associations in this country, to really figure out how this role is going to work best. So over the course of the next couple years, we're really developing something that is bespoke to the Canadian screen industry, so that ideally, people who have already been working as accessibility consultants or Accessibility Coordinators in this country, are going to be able to level up their skills and move into this new role that's going to give them a little bit more authority in terms of accessibility, and hopefully that's going to have a great effect in terms of practically, making sets and environments more inclusive.

R

Rob Mineault 20:41

Yeah, see, it's really, it's really interesting, you know, we've talked to too many disabled creatives over the years in in the industry, and it's, it's really felt like it's a little bit of the Wild West, even for a production that that wants to be inclusive and wants to represent disability properly. I feel like in the past, you know, there wasn't really a clear line there, you know, you'd have. Certainly, you'd have disability consultants, but there was no real infrastructure in there. Or you would have, you know, casting directors that would reach out to, say the blindness community, if they're looking for sort of authentic extras or something. So is that kind of the goal of the DSO is to really take all of those, all of those steps, and really lock them into some sort of a working infrastructure that you can just, you know, sort of expand across the entire industry?

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 21:45

Absolutely. We really want the DSO as an organization to be the first port of call if anybody has questions about disability in the Canadian screen industry. And we also want to take labor off of disabled people, because I know as a disabled actor myself, as someone who is an actor member, as someone who continues to work in the industry, sometimes I get onto set and I am being asked by producers engagers to give feedback about the character that I am playing, or to give feedback about is this an accessible environment? And you know, I completely understand why they're asking me, but really, when I'm on set as an actor member, I'm on set to act, and if you want my expertise as a access as an accessibility professional, that really is something that I should be compensated for. And I know that this happens to a variety of disabled creatives across the industry. So we really want to take that ad hoc labor away from people, because there is also, you know, same as there is a fear for people about disclosing their disabilities. There's also a fear within the disability community of if you get asked to provide feedback to you know, go beyond the scope of what you have already been paid to do on a set, and you say no that that is going to make you less employable going forward. And so I really want to make sure that you know, folks who just want to come on set and act, folks who just want to come to set and write, folks who just want to come to set and direct have the freedom to do that, and that those who really want to step up to the plate in this new managerial accessibility role are the ones who are going to be able to take on that labor, and, you know, sort of protect the emotional and physical well being of everybody on set. And, you know, with things like our industry resource hub, ideally, it's going to be a lot more centralized than going out to, you know, different community based organizations to find, as you mentioned, blind low vision, partially sighted extras, because ideally, casting directors are just going to be able to go to phase two of the hub when it launches into our database of disabled creatives and crew and say, Hey, we're looking for blind, low vision and partially sighted folks to feature in this film. Here is the commitment. And, you know, here is who we're looking for, so that, you know, organizations or individuals who aren't typically interfacing with the Canadian Screen Industry don't have to do the work of, okay, well, you know, we're going to put out this call to, you know, to our community and see who we can reach. We hope that the DSO is going to create more effective pathways for both people to enter the industry and for people to communicate with the disability community within the industry.

S

Steve Barclay 24:52

Now, does the DSO get involved anywhere in any part of the sort of, the accessible distribution aspect of it? I'm talking about, like, Descriptive Video, subtitles, all of that type of thing. Is that something that the DSO is looking to have a hand in as well?

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 25:52

one of the key focus areas of the Disability Screen Office is to advocate for policies that support disabled creatives in the Canadian screen industry. So we do a lot of advocacy at both the municipal, provincial and federal level, including advocating to the CRTC for the adoption of further Descriptive Video and Closed Captioning practices just here in the past year. So absolutely, that's something that we are going to continue to do over the years.

R**Rob Mineault 26:49**

Do are you guys looking to sort of build an infrastructure or resources for creatives to ensure that you know when they're when they're sitting down and they're writing a part for for somebody with a disability that that that part is written in, in a in a sort of a sincere, authentic manner?

A**Alethea Bakogeorge 27:12**

I do think that this is something that our industry resource hub is going to help a lot with. There are a lot of creatives who are already within the Canadian Screen Industry who have a lived experience of disability, and I'm looking forward to those creatives having a chance to bring their voices to more and more projects. And there are also a lot of disabled writers across the country who have not yet been able to enter the industry because of barriers in the industry, who would be excellent fits in writers' rooms across the country to ensure that kind of authentic representation. So I think that when the second phase of our industry resource hub launches, and we have this full database of disabled creatives, people are going to be able to go in and search for disabled writers, disabled writers that may match the disability identity of the character that they're thinking about writing, and bring that expertise into the writers' room. And this is actually something that we have worked in partnership with in the past.

R**Rob Mineault 28:16**

Can you kind of speak a little bit, then, to the importance of of ensuring that people who have lived experience of disability are involved in all parts of of a production?

A**Alethea Bakogeorge 28:30**

I mean, to me, it's so second nature, because I have been disabled my entire life. And it's funny, you know, when I speak to individuals just in my day to day life about what it's like to be a physically disabled person, I am always shocked at how much they are surprised that my life is different from theirs in terms of how I have to pace myself and how I have to fuel myself, and how I have to rest differently, and how my life is organized differently because of the frequency of medical appointments that I go to, et cetera, et cetera, and what my life looks like and the things that I can wear because of my orthotic devices and that kind of thing. And it's really those kinds of details that get missed when we don't have authentic representation in all parts of the process. I think that when we have non disabled people writing about disability, the common trope that we fall into is that disability is a tragedy, but the reality is that, you know, I am a 30 year old woman with cerebral palsy, with a thriving career, a thriving love life, you know, excellent opportunities in all areas of my life, and there's a lot of humor in being disabled. Disabled, there is a lot of grit in being disabled, but not in that sort of inspiration porn way. And I think that you know, when we only have non disabled people writing about disability, the perspective is quite limited when you know, when we invite disabled people to the table, we get the full spectrum of the disability experience. We get the joy, we get the fear, we get the excitement, we get the hilarity. And that's something that I really want to see represented more in the Canadian screen industry. You know, I don't want to see the same three tropes on disability, of disability as metaphor or disability as you know, villain or disability

as threat. I want to see disabled people behaving in all of the ways that anybody behaves on television or in or in film. And I think that until we have authentic representation, it's harder to achieve that. You know, I'm not saying that is necessarily impossible to achieve it with a with a non disabled team, but I am saying that there is a certain perspective that comes with lived experience of disability that really affects, you know, how we can bring a story to the world. And I'm not just talking about that from a from a writing, directing, acting perspective. I am also talking about that from a crew perspective, from a producing perspective. You know, one of the things that the DSO is working to do is reduce the incidence of disability within our industry, because we recognize that the Canadian Screen Industry is a disabling environment. There have been many people who have become disabled as a result of the long days that exist on a film or television set, or because of, you know, accident or injury that occurs going to or from or being on set as well. And so what does storytelling look like? How does storytelling open up if we change our processes? If we are working an 8 hour day instead of a 12 hour day, how does that affect everybody's potential for creativity? And that goes from, you know, a production assistant, all the way up to the executive producer. I do really believe that building accessibility into processes opens up more potential for creativity and innovation across the board, not just in the above the line activities in film and television.

R

Rob Mineault 32:49

You know, I find it really interesting too, because I think you know, going back to the idea of authentic representation and the importance of it. Education and awareness is, is such a is such a is, is such an important aspect of of the disability community, that's what a lot of organizations are, are often, you know, fighting for is, is awareness and advocacy. And so much of what we consume as a society is built around, let's face it, mass media around entertainment, that's where folks really spend a lot of their time. So having having authentic representation in mass media, I think, goes a long way with just raising awareness about disability and about what the lived experience for folks who are living in the community is like. And I think that that is such an important part that of all of this. And really it's just going to, you know, raise all boats, so to speak.

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 33:58

Absolutely. And certainly, education is a key part of what the DSO is doing as well. We are actually in 2026 going to launch another program called the Accessibility and Disability E-learning Series, which is our program that's designed for industry stakeholders to understand and comply with accessibility regulations specific to the Canadian Screen Industry. So essentially, because the federal legislation for disability in Canada is quite new, the Accessible Canada Act and only applies to certain sectors, certain federally regulated sectors, of which broadcast is one. So that has huge implications for what is going on in the film and television world in this country, because we only have federal accessibility legislation that applies to certain sectors and broadly in this country accessibility legislation is designed and implemented at. Provincial level, it means that there are some changes from province to province when you are working in a variety of industries, but certainly also in the film and television industry. So we are putting together an E-learning series to help people understand how is it different when I'm running a film set in Ontario, versus running a film set in British Columbia. What are the accessibility requirements under law in those different jurisdictions? What if I am, you know, a Manitoba based set, but I want to go out for a couple of days to shoot on location in

Saskatchewan. How is that going to change? So we are putting together an E learning program that's going to help industry professionals understand the current laws, regulations, policies and standards, specifically as they apply to the Canadian screen sector, and then provide guidance to them on applying accessibility best practices to remove those barriers and equip people with the tools to assess and improve their own practices so that they can independently identify changes that will lead to improved disability inclusion. And this is going to be an online, asynchronous program that allows participants to learn at their own pace. And it's going to be supported by companion resources that are going to provide further detail on provincial specific accessibility legislation. So, for instance, if you're working in PEI, we're going to provide you with a with a one pager, so that you know what the accessibility requirements are to work in PEI.

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Rob Mineault 36:33

Wow. I mean, I mean this you guys are taking on a lot like, talk to me a little bit about the team itself. How big is it?

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Alethea Bakogeorge 36:42

We are a team of five. We are a national team. We are a small but mighty team, and every single one of us is disabled, so we certainly are taking on a lot, and it is definitely a challenge to figure out how to work best, you know, around our individual access needs, but that's a challenge that we love taking on, because it gives us the opportunity to learn within our own practices and then begin to model that for the industry. So we have a national team of five of us. There are three of us here in Toronto. Our Executive Director, Winnie, look myself, and then our operations manager Elspeth Arbo, our communications manager Cassia Neves is in Ottawa, and our programs manager Deidre Baptiste is in Montreal.

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Rob Mineault 37:31

And so do you do you find that that's that sort of works to the advantage of the team, that you guys are spread out a bit?

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Alethea Bakogeorge 37:39

Absolutely. I mean, it's such a it's such a big country, you know, just in terms of, in terms of land mass, and the different film and television markets in this country operate quite differently depending on where you are. It's very different to be working on a production in Winnipeg, where they do a lot of you know, Hallmark and Lifetime movies of the week than it is to be working on a production in Toronto, than it is to be working on, say, an American production that has come up to Vancouver. So there are a variety of different contexts that we have to be aware of. And we're so fortunate that we have had so much industry buy in from across the country, and we are so happy to be partnered with so many organizations and in conversation with so many different unions, guilds and associations constantly who help us with our work. Because, as you said earlier, our work together really lifts all boats.

R

Rob Mineault 38:43

So I want to get a little bit of your perspective, because it sounds like you know, you've, you've sort of worked in all kinds of different aspects in the industry. So how have you seen disability inclusion going over, say, the past 5 or 10 years, what, what kind of things are you seeing improving, and where do you kind of still see some of those gaps?

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 39:08

You know, I think that we are in a very interesting time here in the Canadian film and television sector. You know, it is very clear that our industry as a whole, is still recovering from the effects of not only the Corona virus pandemic, but also from the effects of the American film and television strikes a couple of years ago. Now, of course, you know that wasn't that didn't directly implicate Canadian productions. But of course, due to the sheer volume of American projects that are shot and produced here in Canada, it did absolutely have a huge effect on our industry as a whole. So I do still think that we are still industry wide in a recovery period. Period, but I do think that in the past five to 10 years, there has been a growing commitment to accessibility and to disability representation. I'm really heartened by anecdotally hearing about more and more writers rooms hiring disabled writers, because I think that that is so crucial to the advancement of disability representation in the Canadian screen industry. I think that it's crucial that disabled writers are not only in the room to write disabled characters, but that disabled writers are in the room to write non disabled characters, I would love to see more disabled writers in the room writing disabled characters whose stories have nothing to do with disability, who just happen to be incidentally disabled, and it's not necessarily related to the plot. And I do think that we are seeing, I do think that we are seeing strides in terms of that. You know, I am really heartened as well by the conversations that the disability screen office continues to have with funders across this country in terms of what funders can do to incentivize further disability representation in the projects that they fund. And that is definitely something that the DSO is working on in terms of, you know, how can we raise the total IQ on disability in the Canadian film and television sector, so that when people are developing new projects, it is second nature for them to think, okay, and where can disability be integrated into this project?

R

Rob Mineault 41:53

Yeah, that's really interesting. You know, I often think about that just the way that that it's often represented in in a movie, a TV show or whatever. And, you know, in my head, I always go back to the, I think, the Gold Star example of how to write disability, and that's in the the show Breaking Bad. Because quite often writers will use disability as some sort of a plot hook or just something that's that doesn't feel authentic, but that show always to me felt like it was just really, really authentic.

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 42:29

Yeah, absolutely, I definitely think that we need more of that, because it can be exhausting as a disabled actor to come into projects where you kind of often feel that the work that you're doing is tonally similar to an after school special, you know, where you feel like you're just

there to be the lesson of the week for the viewers. And I think that there there are so many shades of experience when you live with a disability. You know there are disabled people who behave badly, there are disabled people who you know are villains, and who are not villains because of their disability, but who are who are do things just because that's the way that they are. And I'm looking forward to more stories that focus less on disability as a plot hook and more about disability. Incidentally, being there because, to be perfectly honest, as somebody who has been disabled since the day I was born, there are some days that I forget that I'm disabled, and not because I that, not because I don't experience barriers, not because, you know, I have magically started to be able to walk without issue. That's not the case. But the fact of the matter is that, like, when you live with a disability at a certain point, it just fades into the background of your life, because it is your life. And I would love to see that reflected a little bit more than like, oh my god, disability is the central problem of my life.

R

Rob Mineault 44:20

Yeah. Okay, well, then let's talk about, about the future. Looking ahead for the DSO, what are kind of some of the hopes and and dreams of the organization, say in the next five years?

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 44:35

Yeah. I mean, as I said, we have four key focus areas, so I already mentioned one, which is that we are advocating for policies that support disabled creatives in the screen industry, but our two main public facing focus areas are to build relationships with and foster connections among disabled creatives working and aspiring to work in the screen industry and to influence those working in every stage of content. Production to remove barriers and create opportunities for disabled creatives, and so we're really looking to build on that over the course of the next five years. Some of the things that I have not spoken about yet over the course of this wonderful chat this morning is about our screen festival accessibility program, because we know that festivals and industry events are a cornerstone of the Canadian screen industry, and they're hubs where screen industry professionals connect, relationships flourish, deals are made, and where audiences engage with films and filmmakers. I mean, we feel that right now. It's film festival season. You know, it was just the Toronto International Film Festival. Atlantic International has just happened. The Lunenburg Dock festival is about to begin. It's about to be Vancouver International season. You know, you really feel that from coast to coast. And the interesting thing is, when our executive director Winnie Luk was originally traveling across the country in her first year in her position, she made a point to meet with disabled creatives from coast to coast as she was attending different industry festivals. And almost 100% of the time when she was meeting with disabled creatives and saying, Oh, are you going to this festival? Are you going to that festival? And these were festivals that these creators would have been local to these disabled individuals were saying, no, I'm not going because it's either not accessible to me or I'm perceiving it as a hostile environment because of its inaccessibility. And so we've put together another program that's designed to change it. And so right now, we're working on a multi year initiative to establish Canadian standards to make industry events more accessible to all, and so that's one of the things that we're really looking forward to in the future, is creating spaces where more disabled creatives can access networking opportunities. We're also doing that with our festivals and conferences delegation program, where we provide the opportunity for disabled creatives to attend key industry events so that they can network, gain insight and build connections that advance their career growth in the screen industry. And

so we're really hoping that over the course of the next several years, because of these new guidelines that we are going to publish to make screen industry events more accessible that we're going to see more disabled creatives attending these events, and then hopefully that is going to drive further inclusion in the Canadian Screen Industry, because we know that people go to film festivals to pitch, to make connections, to sell their projects. And so hopefully, if we are getting more disabled creatives in the door at major industry events, we are also going to see more disabled led projects, more projects with authentic disability representation, making their way to screens across the country as well. So that's what we're really looking forward to and, you know, as I mentioned, with our initial research coming out in 2027 from our mapping representation research study, that's really just step one for us. You know, we're really looking forward to repeating that research in years to come, so that we can say, here is how disability representation in the Canadian Screen Industry is either growing or not growing, and what are the reasons that are driving that? You know? What are the barriers that are most present in this current snapshot of the Canadian screen industry? And how can we as a collective of individuals from coast to coast work to remove those?

R

Rob Mineault 48:38

And I'm going to be really interested in seeing that data as well. So yeah, very important work you guys are doing. You know, I really want to thank you for taking some time out of your day and chatting with us. It's been really great. Where can people go to to sort of engage with you guys to find out more information about any of the programs or activities? Plug away.

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 48:59

So first of all, look for our best practices guide on disability representation and inclusion coming in early 2026 that's going to be the preliminary results of some of our data from our mapping representation study, with a full research report to follow. In 2027 we're also going to be publishing some guidelines on Canadian Screen Festival accessibility in 2026 so that's very exciting to come as well. And you can access all of this by keeping up with us on our website. That's www.dso-orphe.ca. We are also on Instagram, on Facebook, on LinkedIn, on YouTube, and you can find all of those in the footer of our website. You can also subscribe to our E-newsletter, so that you can be the first to receive updates on our activities and programs. As a national organization, we are also available entre so again. You can reach out to us either in English or in French as a bilingual organization.

R

Rob Mineault 50:06

Well, thanks so much Alethea and again, best of luck and please anytime you want to come back and chat some more, we'd love to have you.

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 50:15

Absolutely. I would love to. Okay, thanks so much.

—

R

Rob Mineault 50:18

Yeah, okay, take care.

A

Alethea Bakogeorge 50:20

Bye.

R

Rob Mineault 50:22

I love it. I love the fact that that this infrastructure is being put in place in the industry. I feel like, you know, we didn't even think of that. We've been talking about about, you know, authentic representation and inclusion in the film and the entertainment industry for a long time, but I never really thought about an organization in place that that, you know, locks in the infrastructure that that kind of needs to happen before you can have all of that.

R

Ryan Fleury 50:53

Well, I think, you know, it's like audio description. You know, it wasn't people in the public weren't very aware of what audio description was in Canada, and until Descriptive Video works launched in Canada and became a household name in the blindness community, anyway, for audio description and providing excellent description, the television and arts community as well, I think, has been so fragmented. And like you said, it's going to take an organization, possibly like DSO, to bring it all together, to have a set of standards, guidelines, resources that everybody can utilize and take advantage of, yeah, and those resources, I'm sure, will be a big, a big thing too, right?

R

Rob Mineault 51:36

Like a sort of a central hub where creatives can actually go and find all this information out, because I really get the sense that just before, like, you know, again, even a production really wanted to be authentic, they didn't always have a clear path on how to make that happen. So, yeah, this is great. This is very much needed. The only question that I forgot to ask that I'm sort of curious about, is I just wonder if this is, if there is something down in the US similar to DSO, or if they're kind of, you know, forging, forging new ground here. Anyways, um, well, sir, anything else to say about that?

R

Ryan Fleury 52:19

Nope, we'll just have to keep an eye on their website for news. Subscribe to the newsletter if you're interested. And yeah, keep up to date on what's going on in Canada.

R

Rob Mineault 52:29

Yen, most definitely. All right, sir. Well, we better get out of here. We've got days to begin

rep, most definitely. All right, sir. Well, we better get out of here. We've got days to begin.

R Ryan Fleury 52:36
We do indeed.

R Rob Mineault 52:38
All right. Well, Mr. Ryan.

R Ryan Fleury 52:40
Yes. Mr. Rob?

R Rob Mineault 52:42
Where the heck can people find us?

R Rob Mineault 52:44
They can find us online, www.atbanter.com.

R Rob Mineault 52:48
They can also drop us an email if they so desire at cowbell@atbanter.com/

R Ryan Fleury 52:57
That's right, and I'd say Instagram, but nobody's on there. And Mastodon, yeah, we're there, sort of.

R Rob Mineault 53:07
All right, well, then I think that's going to about do it for us this week. Big Thanks, of course, to Alethea for joining us, and we will see everybody next week.

S Steve Barclay 53:24
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