

Emily Yates:

[00:00:00 - 00:00:21]

Welcome back to Redesign, brought to you by mima. We're a human centered design agency that believes in working together with our clients and partners to make infrastructure accessible and inclusive to all. I'm Emily Yates, head of accessibility and Inclusive Design here at MIMA and one of your hosts for this series.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:00:21 - 00:00:26]

And I'm Ollie Bennett Coles, head of marketing at mima, your other host for this podcast. Welcome.

Emily Yates:

[00:00:27 - 00:00:33]

A billion people, that's over 15% of the entire world's population are disabled.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:00:33 - 00:00:43]

And these impairments can be permanent or temporary, visible or non visible, and have an impact on our mobility, sensory processing and communication, amongst many other things.

Emily Yates:

[00:00:43 - 00:01:01]

The bottom line, there's a significant and growing need for accessible travel. In today's episode, we'll be looking at how we can and must make travel a more inclusive part of society. So who can we expect to hear from in today's episode? Ollie.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:01:01 - 00:01:08]

First up, Ben. And we're delighted to introduce Jenny McLachlan, a leader in accessible project development and project Manager at Heathrow Airport.

Emily Yates:

[00:01:09 - 00:01:19]

Yes, we know Jenny well from working with her on the development and update of Heathrow's inclusive design standards, which I'm sure we'll talk about later. Welcome, Jenny.

Guest:

[00:01:19 - 00:01:20]

Lovely to be here.

Emily Yates:

[00:01:21 - 00:01:51]

Our second guest on today's podcast is Martin Heng, an internationally recognized expert on accessible travel who was previously at lonely planet for 20 years, working as their accessible travel manager and editorial advisor. Martin also managed me when I authored the updated Lonely Planet Guide to accessible Rio de Janeiro ahead of the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It's a real pleasure to have you on, Martin. Thanks for joining us.

Guest 2:

[00:01:52 - 00:01:55]

I'm delighted to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:01:55 - 00:02:04]

So, diving right into it, let's talk about each of your careers. Why are you both so passionate about accessible travel and what led you to do what you're doing now? Jenny, let's start with you.

Guest:

[00:02:04 - 00:02:45]

So I guess this is one of those throwbacks to Covid, actually. So when we were all stuck in our houses and I had too much time to think, which anybody who's tried to manage me or work with me knows is a really bad thing. I have ADHD and dyslexia, I started to think about actually the world that my kids would grow up in. My children also have same requirements. And I realized that the two parts of my passion, so my passion for disability advocacy and my role as a project manager, and in particular looking at the Construction Design Management 2015 regulations, I realized that actually quite often in our world, we talk about people, but we don't talk about humans.

Guest:

[00:02:45 - 00:03:13]

And actually when you start to use the word humans and you start to understand and really reflect on how different all of us are, then you can really appreciate how we do not apply standards. Well, we use shortcuts that mean that actually we create barriers to different individuals being able to, in this case, travel with dignity, with enjoyment, with flexibility and choice. And that really is where my passion came from.

Emily Yates:

[00:03:13 - 00:03:30]

That's really lovely and I love that comment around. We focus on people, but we often don't focus on humans. And I think being a human centered design agency, we're all too aware with that. But knowing how to make that change and make that difference is the next step, isn't it? Absolutely.

Emily Yates:

[00:03:30 - 00:03:35]

And Martin, what about yourself? Where did your journey start and where is it now?

Guest 2:

[00:03:35 - 00:04:07]

Well, I've always been a traveler, so I've always loved traveling from when I was very young, when I was 16 or 17, when I first went down to cycle down to France. So I traveled for 10 years in Asia and came to terms of Australia and found that Lonely Planet had its headquarters here, which I never knew. So I'd been using their books for 10 years, but I never knew their home was in Melbourne. Being a career editor, it was obviously the company that I really, really wanted to work for. And I worked for them from 99 until I accident in 2010.

Guest 2:

[00:04:07 - 00:04:42]

And I worked my way up to become editorial manager. And until my accident I never really thought about accessible travel at all, which is quite remarkable considering my bro is actually a quadriplegic and he became a quadriplegic a good 10 years before I did. And I realized that Lonely Planet did provide information about travel with disability as it was called then, but it really wasn't very much, it was very tokenistic. So after my accident, I really thought it was my job to learn about accessible travel. In my return to work phase, that's all I did was actually learn about how do you travel, how does travel with a disability?

Guest 2:

[00:04:42 - 00:05:01]

And it grew on from there. My interest and my passion grew from there until the company was sold. I lost my job as an editorial manager and then I started a new role as accessible travel manager. Then I just spent all my time for the next eight or nine years in that role dedicated to accessible travel.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:05:02 - 00:05:09]

Amazing. Moving on to the next section, could you discuss your kind of current roles and maybe give us an idea of what your day to day looks like?

Guest 2:

[00:05:09 - 00:05:39]

Well, since Lonely Planet closed its doors at the beginning of the pandemic here in Melbourne, I've been freelancing. So I've been doing a bit of writing, but also been projects, doing big projects. So I was commissioned by APEC to produce a series of guidelines and lectures in 2020. So that was best practice, Accessible Tourism Guidelines. And along with that I organized a series of six hours of the world's luminaries in accessible travel from all over the world which accompanied these guidelines.

Guest 2:

[00:05:39 - 00:06:02]

And these epic guidelines were actually uploaded onto a free to access server. So all of this work I did for APAC is actually in the public domain. So that was a really valuable resource. And that was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign affairs and Trade for apec. And then after that I did work for the Australian Tourism Export Council which is a branch of Tourism Australia.

Guest 2:

[00:06:02 - 00:06:32]

And for them I did something a little bit similar. I wrote a handbook for them and then accompanied that with six hours of training delivered directly to tourism operators who are part of the Tourism Export Council. And then subsequent to that I did something very similar for the Global Sustainable Tourism Council which is to deliver six hours of training for their members and also members of their organization. So I've been doing large scale projects around training. Really brilliant.

Emily Yates:

[00:06:32 - 00:06:49]

Thank you, Martin. And there's something really great when the work that you do ends up in the public domain, isn't there? And it's freely accessed by people all over the world. So your accolades and your experience can go all that further. And I think it's definitely having an impact on our industry over here as well.

Emily Yates:

[00:06:49 - 00:06:50]

So thank you for that.

Guest 2:

[00:06:50 - 00:07:07]

Of all the work I've done since Living Learning Planet, I think the APEC resources was the most important because it's in the public domain. Other training that I've done is having to be paid for or it has to be for members of the relevant organizations. So it's the APIC resources that are really, I'm proud of, brilliant.

Emily Yates:

[00:07:07 - 00:07:16]

And how about you, Jenny? Tell us a little bit about your daily responsibilities. What do you get up to as project manager at Heathrow and what does that entail?

Guest:

[00:07:17 - 00:07:59]

I guess there's no typical day for a project manager at Heathrow. I always describe trying to do infrastructure or construction projects at Heathrow, like operating on a conscious patient. As we can imagine, we operate 3, 6, 5, 247. So actually trying to safely for both the passengers, but also for the construction workers operate and build and fix and maintain our assets within those very small windows is a challenge every day. And the weather just adds to that, which if you've been in the UK in the last few weeks and I know this is recorded so you might not know, but the weather we've had, the wind, the thunderstorms we've had every season in a day, and trying to safely have an airfield in that, let alone do construction, is always a challenge.

Guest:

[00:08:00 - 00:08:30]

So, yeah, at the moment I am part of a project that is building our virtual control facility. So it's a backup facility for air traffic control. So if there's a problem within the tower, that is where they go back to. But I've done a multitude of projects from repairing parts of the Runway through to providing a fire training facility for our fire team, through to

creating some IT and other assets that help the airport to operate in different circumstances. So very, very varied in my 16 odd years here at Heathrow.

Guest:

[00:08:31 - 00:09:06]

But I guess the most passionate and the most driven I've been has been in the last sort of three to four years when I've really started to embed accessibility into all of my projects and across our teams and done a number of sort of full time side projects because of that, including working with external groups and always looking for the ability to talk about and influence others to see accessibility as one of the main things they need to concentrate on when providing any sort of services, infrastructure or process technology to our airport.

Guest 2:

[00:09:06 - 00:09:27]

That's really good to hear, Jenny, because I mean also often accessibility is regarded as an add on or a nice to have or something that is dedicated to a special unit or a special department or a special person. But I just love the fact that you embed it in all your projects and that it's an essential part or it should be an essential part of all thinking from the very beginning.

Guest:

[00:09:28 - 00:10:00]

Absolutely 100% agree. And what I have driven, or the catch, I guess that has helped me to drive this forward is understanding how important accessibility is to safety. And when we have a mandate to keep everybody safe, the only way we can truly do that is to absolutely acknowledge that all humans experience safety differently. And if we haven't thought about all of their needs, then we are not keeping to our commitment and we have inequitable safety. And it's the one thing that people can't necessarily walk away from or say.

Guest:

[00:10:00 - 00:10:04]

It's not important when you're talking about the ability for somebody to remain safe.

Guest 2:

[00:10:05 - 00:10:13]

And yet when it comes to accommodation providers, there are almost none that have an evacuation plan for people with disability.

Guest:

[00:10:13 - 00:10:24]

Yep. Or they all focus on one particular aspect of disability and don't consider the broad range of different things that might impact somebody being able to evacuate safely.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:10:24 - 00:10:40]

It's striking how much of an impact both of you have made in your careers so far. I think I'd love a follow up question for you both. Really. What would you say some of the biggest challenges facing the end user in terms of traveling? I know you just touched on a little bit there, but what are the kind of the biggest challenges you think are facing the end user in terms of traveling?

Guest 2:

[00:10:40 - 00:11:09]

Specifically, the biggest obstacle for any traveler with access need or disability is a lack of information. That is the single biggest barrier to travel is the lack of information. It's something that can be solved so simply by providing that information by tourism service providers at all levels, whether they're airports or whether they're small AirBNBs. By providing information about accessibility, you are enabling travelers with access needs to visit you and to use your services.

Emily Yates:

[00:11:10 - 00:11:13]

Yes. Could not agree with that more, Martin.

Guest:

[00:11:13 - 00:11:50]

I would also echo that, Martin. I think we all are attempting to fix our own small bits or small cog within a travel journey. And actually the information that we provide each other as well as providing the end user means that that journey can be much more seamless. There is a benefit to Heathrow, for example, looking to become more accessible. But we are one part of a person's journey and we need to make sure that we are supporting all of the elements of that travel experience to come with us, to join with us and share information between us so that there aren't gaps in that information.

Guest 2:

[00:11:50 - 00:12:30]

Any chain is only as strong as its weakest link is often what's said in accessibility travel circles and the accessible travel chain needs to be every link needs to be strong and the travel journey starts like right here I'm sitting at my desk and this is where the travel journey starts and things need to be accessible from the beginning of the travel journey to the very end of the travel work journey when I'm back in my suitcase. So if accessibility starts when I'm sitting at my desk, when I'm planning my journey, when I'm planning my trip, when I'm planning my holiday, that means the first piece of the puzzle is that I'm able to access information on an accessible website.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:12:31 - 00:12:53]

Exactly. Digital accessibility is so, so, so important. I guess for both of you, it's really clear that you're always working on projects that increase accessibility across the travel sector. I guess for the next few question topics of the conversation, we really want you to pick out ones that you feel have had a real tangible impact on industry. Jenny, perhaps could you talk about the recent inclusive design overlay work and the challenges and outcomes of this.

Guest:

[00:12:53 - 00:13:18]

It's been an absolute labour of love. Since that first moment. I was stuck in this room thinking too much. I talked to a number of people across different sectors, different clients, contractors, design agencies, et cetera, about actually how do we measure accessibility? How does somebody new coming across accessibility for the first time, how do they understand what the roadmap could be, where they are in the journey, etc.

Guest:

[00:13:19 - 00:13:53]

And there really isn't anything out there for the built environment. There is for digital accessibility. There are a number of tools and resources you can use and guidance out there, but actually something that brings it all together for the built environment didn't exist. So myself and an amazing lady called Paris really did start to knock on many doors, have many conversations with different agencies, until we were finally sort of welcomed into reba, the Royal Institute of British Architects. REBA agreed that we could run a police, which goes with their plan of works.

Guest:

[00:13:53 - 00:14:28]

The plan of works is all the stages that architects will go through, from the first idea through to handover and into, into practice. And they have a number of overlays that work with this. And so we created the inclusive design overlay that would support anybody from a project manager, the contractors team, the architects, the design team, the end users, facilities management, to understand how do they engage and work together through the life of the project to ensure that accessibility has been thought about at every single stage. So I'm really, really proud. After two years of work, we finally published it this year.

Guest:

[00:14:28 - 00:14:58]

It's already being used and written into government and other documents. Sports England, for example, are going to mandate it in the use of all of their new infrastructure. And it's through that that actually we can make an impact. We have something that people can pick up, put into tender documents, pick up from a contractor side and understand how do they ask the client the right questions in order to make sure that we

are designing equitably with the human centered going forward. So I'm very proud and very happy that we've managed to achieve that.

Guest 2:

[00:14:58 - 00:15:07]

That sounds fabulous. And I mean, you said it's human centered design, it's inclusive design. May I ask how it aligns with design principles?

Guest:

[00:15:08 - 00:15:44]

It aligns with the universal design in the fact that you are ensuring that the choices and the decisions that you're making at each stage of the project, you've engaged with the group of stakeholders and users to ensure that their requirements are the key point of your decision making. So it doesn't necessarily state that you're going to be able to answer and create an environment that is going to fix Everything. Because at the moment, we don't have the supply chain that's ready to be able to do that. But what it is is making incremental steps in that direction.

Emily Yates:

[00:15:45 - 00:16:18]

And huge congratulations to you and Parese and the other stakeholders that were involved in getting this off the ground. Jenny, it really is amazing for industry. And I wasn't involved with it personally, but I had a lot of conversations with Paris about it. And one thing that I think is really amazing and really one of the first times that I've seen this out there in industry is it doesn't assume that people will have personal and professional experience of disability or other protected characteristics. And I think that's so, so important.

Emily Yates:

[00:16:18 - 00:16:54]

Quite often, as access consultants, as I am, it's very easy to assume that people will know and understand exactly how to involve people with lived experience, as one particular example, to run focus groups or to instruct a contractor in a certain way. And

actually that's not the case, and we shouldn't assume that. So for me, it's a bit of a lesson to us as well to say, okay, these are things that we should also be doing as industry professionals to make sure that the understanding is as circular and informed as it needs to be. And I think that's really great.

Guest:

[00:16:54 - 00:17:26]

No, 100% agree. I think it's very easy when you are upskilling and educating yourself to forget that you've got to bring others with you. And sometimes I am very guilty of charging ahead and forgetting that others may not be at the same place I am. And actually I need to ensure that. I've had given them time to process the information, given them time to really understand how many decisions they're making every day are based on unconscious biases we all have.

Guest:

[00:17:26 - 00:17:37]

But it is about bringing those to the fore so that we can, instead of doing it the way we've always done it, we have to actually start to challenge ourselves, and we have to allow that time for others to start to recognize that.

Emily Yates:

[00:17:37 - 00:18:13]

And Martin, moving on to you, I loved one thing that you said earlier about information being the massive void that it is in terms of accessible travel. We definitely experience this. Well, I have, both professionally and personally, quite often, whether we're working with airports or museums or global events, we've done some great work in the built environment. But then the next step always has to be, okay, how are we going to share this information so people are aware that it's actually in existence? So I agree that that's been a huge, huge challenge in the accessible travel industry.

Emily Yates:

[00:18:13 - 00:18:26]

And I think it's fair to say that another huge challenge has been the pandemic. So what impact has Covid really had in your opinion and what have you noticed, both good and bad in the industry since then?

Guest 2:

[00:18:26 - 00:18:59]

A few good things have happened through Covid for people with access needs. There's been a few innovations that have been useful for people with disabilities, particularly in the terms of the introduction of hands free technology. Hands free? Washing your hands with motion sensors, for example, or sanitizing your hands with motion centers and other kind of innovations like that have helped. I don't know why though, but since the pandemic, since travel started up again, I've really noticed a strong interest in accessible travel and I don't know why that is now.

Guest 2:

[00:18:59 - 00:19:27]

Interestingly, both UNWTO and the wtto, the World Travel and Tourism Organization, they both released inclusive travel guidelines post pandemic as the first set of accessible travel guidelines post pandemic. So I have noticed that. I don't think that there has been as much interest in accessible tourism in Australia before the pandemic. In fact, I know there hasn't been as much interest before the pandemic as there is now. And I have no idea why this is.

Guest 2:

[00:19:27 - 00:19:54]

I can't explain it at all in terms of is travel easier? No, it certainly isn't easier and certainly there are. I know many people with disability who are immunocompromised particularly, but also those who have other disabilities who are still wary of trouble. And I also know that people are wary of travel because in some parts of the world even wearing a mask is frowned upon and people are abused for wearing masks for their own self protection. And I find that that's very disheartening.

Emily Yates:

[00:19:55 - 00:20:15]

Yeah, absolutely agreed. And I wonder if it's something to do with a sudden understanding of how fragile life is and the fact that we're not really disabled and non disabled people were disabled and not yet disabled people. And I wonder if the pandemic was part of hitting that home in some way. I'm not sure.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:20:16 - 00:20:31]

Yeah, I completely agree Em, and I think for a lot of people, I think there's been an increase in empathy since the pandemic. And as you say, that sense of vulnerability I think we all felt during various stages throughout the world, perhaps that's been responsible for driving that empathy, especially around accessibility and inclusion.

Guest:

[00:20:31 - 00:21:09]

I think there's also an indication that the demographics of those that are traveling has changed. We've certainly seen it here that actually the business traveler, the traveler that we expect to just know what to do. And you know, has done it multiple times and doesn't necessarily have the anxiety or other that traveling through the airport or traveling in general can happen. And actually there's a swing towards the sort of older generation who has the time and the money. And also, you know, after the pandemic has the desire to travel more, to not get to the end of their life and regret not having seen certain places.

Guest:

[00:21:09 - 00:21:53]

And the studies here show that, you know, the DWP 2018, 2019 study shows that 44% of pensioners have at least one disability and 40% of that UK population has at least one long term health condition. So actually maybe it's an understanding that with the demographics changing and as you say, we all have changes in our circumstances, whether it's our sight or our hearing, musculoskeletal issues or other long term health conditions, actually it's a recognizing that we all have access requirements and at some point in our life we are going to start worrying about whether those access requirements are met or not. And maybe we need to think about that now while we have a chance to change it.

Guest 2:

[00:21:53 - 00:22:19]

Well, Greg van der Heyden, who developed the first web accessibility guidelines, said it well, he said we will all develop disabilities one day unless we die first. Which is a very crude, a very simple way of driving that point home. And I like the point you make about demographic change. I don't know about the pandemic effectiveness, but if you look at the graphs of demographic change, you realize that by 2030, 1 in 6 people is going to be over 60. That's 1.4 billion people.

Guest 2:

[00:22:19 - 00:22:42]

By 2050, there are going to be more than 2 billion people over 60. And people, as you said, people age into disability, people over 60 retiring. 40% of people retire with an acquired disability of some sort. And the incidence of disability increases exponentially with age. Basically by the time you're over 80, you are more likely than not to have one disability or another.

Guest 2:

[00:22:42 - 00:23:02]

And I think tourism is slowly waking up to this demographic change and realizing that if they're going to be sustainable as a business into the future, they're going to have to cater to this aging demographic with increasing access needs. And that is actually the market driver behind accessible travel, not people who are currently or congenitally disabled.

Emily Yates:

[00:23:02 - 00:23:09]

Too true. I just love people that come to podcast recordings with facts and figures. So thank you so much both of you, that was great.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:23:10 - 00:23:19]

Amazing. Jenny, you mentioned some research earlier. Can you touch on the Heathrows open to all paper that came out before COVID actually? What were the key findings from that research?

Guest:

[00:23:20 - 00:23:55]

I think the key findings was that actually it's not a small percentage of our travelers that require support when they travel through the airport. Actually, the statistic is that 34% of travelers require some sort of support to go through the airport. And if you add to that their family, their friends and everything else, actually you're probably looking at over 50% of those that are traveling require some sort of assistance in some way. So actually it doesn't become, as Martin said earlier, a small group who requires some special thing. Actually it's something we need to do.

Guest:

[00:23:55 - 00:24:34]

In order short majority of our travelers are supported and can travel. And what we actually found was the three things they particularly want is to be able to have flexibility, to have choice and to enjoy the journey through the airport. And those were the three things we wanted to consider. And when they were looking at the demographics, this was actually the largest study ever done on travelling on aircraft travel or travel street airports to date. And the study came out and showed that 24% of our travelers have some sort of physical disability, whether that is bound with particular limb requirements or through to diabetes.

Guest:

[00:24:34 - 00:25:13]

These are all considered and actually the largest cohort was actually psychological, 49%. Now, whether that is because we are a hub airport and therefore the majority of our travelers that are transiting are sleep deprived and have some sort of, you know, requirement in terms of supporting their journey because actually their cognitive abilities are reduced during that period. And actually cognitive came out at 36%. So those traveling with a neurodivergent condition or dementia or other sort of mental differences, then that actually is a large group of humans that we need to consider. Sensory came out at 13%.

Guest:

[00:25:13 - 00:25:42]

So whether that is sort of hearing impairment, sight impairments, such like, and cultural was 6%. So we also need to think across our accessibility requirements. Are we thinking about those traveling through that might have particular religious or other cultural requirements that we're currently not meeting, and ensuring things like prayer rooms or dignity when being searched, thinking about food requirements, etc. All of these things are access needs that we need to consider.

Guest 2:

[00:25:42 - 00:25:56]

It's so wonderful to hear someone that works for an airport speaking about the panoply of different access needs and different requirements for different groups and not just talk about PRMs. Passengers with restricted mobility. I mean, it's so refreshing.

Guest:

[00:25:56 - 00:26:45]

We moved from talking about PRMs to PRs for that particular reason to draw out and signify that we understand that our passengers require support and that passengers is a wider breadth than those that might just need some sort of physical assistance, I guess, for lack of a better term. But you know, and actually one of the biggest things we've found is the pushback from passengers who don't want to be placed in a wheelchair to be pushed through the airport. They want to be able to enjoy the experience, but currently we don't necessarily have the right tools to provide them a more tailored service through PRs and maybe even just touch points through their journey rather than sort of starting in one part of the airport and being taken to a different part of the airport. They want to be able to self mobilise if they can.

Guest 2:

[00:26:46 - 00:27:21]

I was recently commissioned by the valuable 500 to write a piece based on some research that they had conducted among 3,500 people with disability in five countries. And what you say resonates with me because the most important thing for all groups in

all countries was not physical accessibility, it was being treated with kindness and respect and being treated and having staff who understood their needs. These were the two top most important things for travellers with disabilities. Not having a ramp, not having this or that, but having understanding, kindness and respect shown to them.

Guest:

[00:27:21 - 00:28:10]

And I think it's interesting how each country chooses to measure that and to hold the relevant groups to account, because actually when you put time bound pressures on institutions, you don't necessarily create the right culture for the staff members, the colleagues, that is the supporting to have the time to be kind. If you're being measured on, it's the time it takes to get you from one part of the airport to another. So that's a really interesting. I'd love to read that report because it would help me to have conversations with our relevant authorities and with our airlines around. Actually, we need to be better at measuring ourselves against the experience of a passenger, not the time it takes, because I think that's far more important.

Guest 2:

[00:28:11 - 00:28:18]

Yeah, it's absolutely. A much more important metric is the customer satisfaction, not how many units you move through it in how shorter time.

Guest:

[00:28:19 - 00:28:50]

It's why I always talk about humans, because it's the one thing we all are. And when you strip away all of the labels and all the difference, we all fundamentally want the same thing. We want to be loved, we want to be seen, we want to be heard and we wanted to be treated with dignity and enjoy the life we have. And when you remember that, it's much easier to be passionate and to drive the change through, even when sometimes it's hard, because fundamentally you're trying to make it equitable.

Guest 2:

[00:28:51 - 00:29:28]

After information, I think the next Most important thing is disability awareness training, basically so that people know how to interact with people with disability and people aren't worried, scared to saying the wrong thing, scared of doing the wrong thing. And I think this is a problem with tourism service providers generally in terms of accessibility. They're too worried about not being perfect and doing the right thing by everybody so they won't dip their toe into the water. What businesses need to realize is that anything that they can do will be appreciated. So whatever you have, put it out there so people can decide for themselves whether a property or experience is suitable for them.

Guest 2:

[00:29:28 - 00:29:38]

Don't presume you know what people need and want. Put the information out there and let them decide for themselves. All you need to do is provide a welcoming and supportive environment once they get there.

Emily Yates:

[00:29:38 - 00:29:42]

I'd like to have progress, not perfection, tattooed on my forehead.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:29:45 - 00:29:47]

It'd be a good conversation starter on a podcast, that's for sure.

Emily Yates:

[00:29:47 - 00:29:53]

It would. It would. A good icebreaker, for sure, for sure. Thank you both. That was really, really nice.

Emily Yates:

[00:29:53 - 00:30:15]

And from talking about one of the biggest reports ever delivered, Jenny to one of the biggest databases created, Martin, could you please touch on the accessible travel online resources that you were a huge part of and the story behind those? I remember these having a real impact on industry when they were released, so I'd love to hear a little bit more.

Guest 2:

[00:30:16 - 00:30:38]

They grew from an academic project that I did. Funnily enough, before my accident, I was studying a master's degree in communications. And then after my accident, of course, I had to take a hiatus. And then I had four units to do, and two of the units was what was called professional practice. Now, as I said, in my return to work phase, I'd been trying to educate myself about accessible tourism.

Guest 2:

[00:30:38 - 00:30:57]

And I had about a billion links that I bookmarked. And I thought, what? Use these links on my computer. So as part of this course, this professional practice is that I'll do a project that you would do at work, but you don't have time. So my project was basically to organize these links into something more useful.

Guest 2:

[00:30:57 - 00:31:12]

And then that grew a university assignment into the published Accessible Travel Online Resources, which is the world's largest collection of resources for traveling with a disability. So that was a. It was a very nice genesis story for that. And I did that for three editions. And unfortunately, that's.

Guest 2:

[00:31:12 - 00:31:36]

I mean, as we all know, websites go out of date very quickly. So that was a few years since that's been updated. So it's probably sadly out of date by now. I would love to Resurrect that in some format perhaps, because I do think that it really was a great

planning tool for people with disability. Lonely Planet prided itself on providing information so that people could be more independent when traveling.

Guest 2:

[00:31:36 - 00:31:39]

And that was what I was trying to do by publishing these resources.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:31:40 - 00:31:49]

Such important and impactful work. Martin. It's amazing, Jenny. Moving on to something maybe a little more kind of holistic. Could you talk about the umbrella project at Heathrow?

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:31:49 - 00:31:50]

What was the story behind it?

Guest:

[00:31:50 - 00:32:22]

Yes. So when I found out my son was diagnosed with ADHD and I was reflecting on the world that he was going to have to live in, realized that there was very little I could do about the education system as much as I'd like to, but there was something I could do about the world of work. I could make my own employer more aware, more acceptable, have bigger awareness around how to support somebody who had cognitive differences. I'm dyslexic. During that journey I also found out that I have adhd.

Guest:

[00:32:22 - 00:32:58]

Through learning with my son about what he would need and how he would have challenges. And on a train to an away day, I had the ridiculous idea that we would put on the umbrella project at Heathrow. So I contacted a good friend of mine at work called

Ben Jones, said, do you want to do something ridiculous? He was like, of course, Jenny. So we approached all of the main contractors at Heathrow, so Mace Balfour, Beatties Ferrovie and Morgan Sindel and together we funded for 300 umbrellas to be put up in the Terminal 5 full court.

Guest:

[00:32:58 - 00:33:49]

The project is created by the ADHD foundation, the Amazing Dr. Tony Lloyd and it's been on in the BBC Media Centre. It's started in Liverpool which is where the ADHD foundation are based. It's since been in many other different venues but the idea is to celebrate neurodiversity, to celebrate that all of our brains work differently and to move away from the deficit model that there is something wrong with us that needs to be fixed and actually celebrate that the difference is, is part of some amazing tapestry of human evolution and is just part of being human. So I loved it and yeah, it was an absolute amazing joy to see those 300 umbrellas and see the impact it had on so many different people traveling through the airport, working at the airport and has led to some great innovation and changes within our industry and.

Emily Yates:

[00:33:49 - 00:33:51]

Love being able to see that.

Guest:

[00:33:51 - 00:34:09]

The best thing was we had a lady come through who is a well known American dancer and actress who became the patron of the ADHD foundation because she saw The Umbrellas searched up the link and was just blown away by what it was trying to achieve and. And then took it back over to America.

Emily Yates:

[00:34:09 - 00:34:32]

So cool. Jenny. And just to add to this, it wouldn't be a Mimer podcast unless we spoke a little bit about ourselves. So it would be good to just talk a bit about the inclusive design

standards that we created together and the involvement that you and the HAND Network had in this. I think it's particularly important because then you mentioned contractors and contractors supporting and sponsoring the umbrella project.

Emily Yates:

[00:34:32 - 00:34:47]

And I would like to think that hopefully those standards give them a little bit of support as well. So hopefully we've got a bit of a full circle environment going on there, but just good to hear a little bit more about the impact maybe that those standards have had since.

Guest:

[00:34:48 - 00:35:39]

It was an amazing feat and, you know, Mima did a great job in pulling together what is not an easy, easy reference document to create. And particularly the amazing thing I think that was woven into that document, that it wasn't just about the infrastructure, it actually covered some of the things we needed to do in terms of awareness, training, the more holistic changes we needed to make in the airport for the standards to work on their own. They're very infrastructure focused. But it's more than that when you're traveling through the airport, which was brilliant, I think, since then, how we contract with our design teams and our contractors, you know, they are there now as a reference document that are being utilized as each project is designing the changes to the airport. And we're starting to see that pull through with the delivery of anything from new toilet facilities through to our security transformation project, which is happening at the moment.

Guest:

[00:35:39 - 00:35:55]

It's been really good to see them come to life and come into fruition. And I think, you know, we're already reviewing and looking at what next. We're not standing still. There is so much new resources and tools out there that we need to bring in. We need to keep moving forward.

Guest:

[00:35:55 - 00:36:33]

As you say, it's progress, not perfection. So we do need to review and update and bring on board our new contractors are and even look at how we better embed, you know, inclusive designers into all of our programs so that actually we have a person there whose sole role is to be the conscience of the programme and the project, to ask the right questions at the right times. Having just visited the RNIBs, so the institute of the Blinds, a new building. Grimaldo. It's just amazing the sense of belonging you get from walking into a building that really has had human Centered design.

Guest:

[00:36:33 - 00:36:47]

It's all the small things make such an impact on feeling like you are valued and you belong there. So yeah, it's definitely something we're going to continue with and thank Mima Emily in particular for creating our first real push this space.

Emily Yates:

[00:36:47 - 00:37:13]

It's so good to hear that it's having really good impact and will hopefully continue to do so for time to come. So thank you so much, Jenny. That's really, really good to know. And we're coming to the end of our recording time, so we wanted to finish with a question that we think all of us are juggling with every day in the world that we work in. In particular, how do you both envisage the future of travel, in particular accessible travel?

Emily Yates:

[00:37:14 - 00:37:22]

Are we on track and how can we course correct if we're on the wrong path? Martin, we'll start with you for that biggie, if that's okay.

Guest 2:

[00:37:22 - 00:37:58]

I think we actually are on the right track. I'm very, very hopeful post pandemic at how much attention is being paid to accessible tourism. I'm also very hopeful in the sense that there's been a lot of talk about DEI over the years and it's first of all it was DEI was

women and then it was people of color. And increasingly it actually is talking about true diversity and people with disability are now being included under the banner of dei. So I think that impetus from the company of corporate science is also really important to push the agenda for accessibility.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:37:59 - 00:38:11]

Yeah, that's so true. So true. And Jenny, coming to you now, what do you think the future of travel looks like for you? Pardon the ropey pun, but if the sky really was the limit, how would accessible travel feature definite heathrow by let's say 2050?

Guest:

[00:38:12 - 00:39:14]

So I think if sky was the limit, we would provide a number of flexible options on how you want to be able to travel through the airport from our traditional PRS service through to VIP through to. Actually I just want the reassurance that there is someone there to help at the points that I need help. I would love to see our retail offerings become much more accessible that we've thought about the ability for everybody to travel, to have the same different experiences that we all kind of come to know. And I think in order for that to happen and how we course correct to do that is that we have to work better together as an industry. I think that at the moment, and you know, Martin said this early on, accessibility is often the last thing that's considered or an add on or the special circumstances if we are being true to how we've spoken all the way through this podcast that travel is about humans.

Guest:

[00:39:14 - 00:39:30]

Humans are all different. They all need different things. Then it should be the first thing we consider when we're designing our travel. It should be the first information that we're sharing. All conferences, all different gatherings of aviation and travel industry specialists.

Guest:

[00:39:30 - 00:39:43]

The first thing on the agenda should be how do we ensure that travel is accessible to all, open to all, and everybody has the same dignity and enjoyment when accessing it.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:39:43 - 00:39:55]

Amazing. Thank you both so much for sharing all your knowledge and insights. From my perspective, is it a genuine privilege to be sat listening to the impact that you've made on accessible travel to absolute trailblazers in the industry? So thank you so much.

Emily Yates:

[00:39:55 - 00:39:58]

Absolutely seconded. Thank you so much.

Guest 2:

[00:39:58 - 00:39:59]

Thank you so much for having me.

Guest:

[00:40:00 - 00:40:01]

Lovely to meet you.

Emily Yates:

[00:40:03 - 00:40:12]

So, to everyone out there, thank you so much for tuning in. We hope you've enjoyed the conversation and have gained some fresh new insights.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:40:12 - 00:40:26]

Please head over to our website, mimegroup.com for more information on our work or to discuss how we could help you in your organization. And if you have any questions, ideas or comments, use the hashtag design that connects us to join the conversation.

Emily Yates:

[00:40:26 - 00:40:28]

And once again, I'm Emily Yates.

Oliver Bennett-Coles:

[00:40:28 - 00:40:33]

And I'm Ollie Bennett Coles. And this has been the redesign podcast from my ma.

Emily Yates:

[00:40:33 - 00:40:42]

And be sure to subscribe to all future podcasts wherever you get them, and we'll see you all on the next episode.